Researching an Overlooked Workforce in a University:

catering, caretaking and security staff

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Abstract

The people who service the physical needs of university populations and maintain their built environment are barely acknowledged in the research into university life. An observed dissonance between university staff encountered on the ground and those appearing in the literature prompted this research into the work experience of university catering, caretaking and security staff.

This thesis is based on a case study which investigated perceptions of this experience in an English university. Consideration was given to the contribution of these staff to the social and learning aspects of the institution. The research was positioned within the theoretical tension between the structural nature of the social determinants of work, and individual subjective responses to working practices. The format of the study was guided by Paul Edwards' consideration of the components of a useful labour process analysis. The research strategy was an inductive single case study, drawing on ethnographic traditions of observation and conversation, supplemented by the perusal of documents. A first phase of familiarisation was followed by a second stage of interviews, participant and non-participant observation. Forty-five staff were directly engaged with the research with informal observations and conversations with others. Thematic analysis was used to consider data across the case study.

English universities have been subject to structural change which have created large, fragmented and dispersed populations and impacted on the ways that the built environment is used. The formal work activities of these staff enabled the University to open and operate securely. They contributed to the social processes of the institution through their interactions with staff, students, customers and visitors. It is argued that they also had a valuable role in establishing a friendly, welcoming, supportive environment for students through discretionary, activity during frequent encounters. The work of these staff was closely structured as to time, place and task. These everyday social interactions provided an autonomous opportunity to craft their work environment and develop relationships whose significance is insufficiently explored in the current literature on low paid and low status work.

Table of Contents

List of Tables, Figures and Appendices

Figures

Appendices

Chapter 1 – Introduction

English universities are complex social organisations occupying physical estates. This thesis is about those workers at the lower end of the institutional hierarchy and the ways in which they experience their work. Universities can be considered as having four, interrelated functions; as gathering places, places of learning, businesses and workplaces. People gather in large numbers on university estates, arriving from countries across the world, all parts of the UK and the immediate locality. They meet, eat, excrete, sleep, socialise, find sexual partners, make friends and enemies. Some live on site, others attend regularly and frequently, some visit intermittently and others use sites as local amenities. All these people gather on dispersed sites which are disparate in age and function. They gather for a purpose. The most widely recognised function of universities is as places of learning, education and training. Knowledge from research and scholarship are communicated to society through publication, teaching, consultancy and advice. As a business universities compete for customers, bid for contracts, rent out their estates and market their commercial interests. These functions and the estates on which they occur require staffing.

As a workplace universities have some distinguishing characteristics. The most striking is the presence of a large, fluctuating population of students. This group is fragmented by level and subject of study, course duration and mode of provision. A smaller group of staff is fragmented by function, occupational status, employment contract and pay. Apparent hierarchy is challenged by external requirements and the complicated role of students. Students pay to be there, yet are theoretically the junior part of the population. Their work determines the success of the enterprise and consequently the jobs and income of the staff who are paid to be there and to manage the work of students. This creates an interdependent relationship which has the potential for interpersonal tensions. Staff also work with contractors, customers, visitors, tourists and local people attracted by university commercial activities and amenities.

Although described as a sector, higher education institutions are not a homogenous group. Universities are individual organisations with considerable differences between them in status, function and size. They have developed by different routes which have left historical structural tensions within the sector.

1.1 **Structural Tensions – Within the University Sector**

The degree to which universities must respond to concepts of economic need, social justice and political control have been contested since the post-war expansion of higher education. At that time there was a need for a more skilled and educated general workforce, particularly scientists and engineers, to participate in both economic and civic re-building. Allied to the 1945 Labour Government's social equality agenda this pointed to wider access to university education (Zuckerman, 1996; Simon, 1955). To this end, the determination of the size of the student population became a political responsibility.

> "…. courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so."
> Higher Education Report ('Robbins', 1963 p.8)

This aspiration has been reiterated ever since by Governments of different political traditions, it's latest appearance being in the White Paper of 2011 (BIS, 2011). This sounds impressive but is difficult to achieve, with constant tensions over who is qualified by abililty, what counts as attainment and what are the constraints on choice?

A much argued tension has been to what extent universities should educate the country's citizens or train its workforce (Newman, 2000). The polarities of this debate have contrasted the intrinsic value of liberal education against the imperative for practical training acquired in the most efficient and cost effective way (hefce, 2008; Hodkinson, 1991). Liberal education as described by Cardinal Newman in 1854 and energetically defended by Maskell and Robinson (2002) is intended to educate the person, forming who they are and how they

participate in society. The focus is on the preservation, transmission and expansion of accumulated scholarship. The pre-eminence of this view was challenged by the educational requirements of industry for advanced training and research in scientific and technological knowledge (Halsey, 1958). The perception that technical and vocational education was not well served by the existing universities was structurally addressed in the binary system of higher education established in 1968. This demarcated independent universities against polytechnics, funded through Local Authorities and subject to political control. A direct relationship between public funding and the expectation of social and economic benefit was established. This has been a stimulus for debate ever since. Over time these two institutional strands became less distinct, Universities offered more vocational courses, Polytechnics offered courses in humanities and social sciences (Merrison 1996), becoming

> "…. institutions which increasingly came to look like universities but which lacked the legal status, the funding structures and the public recognition which the universities enjoyed." (Shattock 1996 p.11)

In 1992 the Further and Higher Education Act allowed Polytechnics to adopt University status, all their student provision became university places. Polytechnics appeared to do well out of the abolition of the binary system. They gained greater autonomy, potentially improved status, unit resource increased and funding became available for new buildings and research, (Price, 1992). However, this attempt to merge two systems of such different traditions and purposes has left a legacy of tensions within a stratified university sector. There were concerns that an unofficial binary system might be reinforced in practice as universities sought to differentiate themselves (Filmer, 1997). This demarcation can be seen in the three main groupings that were formed between universities of similar status and historical development. The Russell Group, founded in 1994 comprised 20 elite, research-intensive universities; the 1994 group, with 19 universities considered research intensive, but not included in the Russell Group. Million+, founded in 1997, comprised 28 members, mainly ex-polytechnics (1994 Group, 2011; Russell Group, 2008; Million +, 2008). After nearly twenty years, the concept of 'post-1992' university still lingers as shorthand for ex-

polytechnic. Young people enrolling for university this year were not born at the time of this change in institutional status. People nearing forty have no experience of the binary system, yet the terms are still used in academic writing and in formal reporting. In staffing profiles the Higher Education Funding Council for England uses a basic division of 'pre-1992' and 'post-1992' institutions (hefce, 2008). Commentators occasionally have a sneering tone when writing of the 'post-1992' universities. Research activity and funding has become another indicator of university status with descriptions of 'research intensive' and 'teaching intensive' as synonymous with elite and mass education institutions.

The debate over the purpose and autonomy of higher education was vigorously reignited at the time of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education ('Dearing') in 1997. The Committee terms of reference were dominated by three areas, economic competitiveness, employment and lifetime learning. It was for economic and individual demand to determine access to education. This has been reiterated in the current White Paper which proposes the size of the sector should be driven by:

> "…. demand from students and employers, reflecting particularly the wider needs of the economy" (BIS, 2011, p.49)

Comparing "The Case for Universities" (1996) from the National Conference of University Professors and the 'Dearing' Report, the difference in tone and language is striking. The Professors write of intellectual honesty, thought, academic freedom, disinterested enquiry and study. 'Dearing' is about enterprise, sub-degree expansion, the fast production of graduates, key skills and the learning experience. The report does not refer to Universities, to the indignation of Maskell and Robinson (2002). The terminology has become Higher Education Institutions and the Higher Education Sector. They suggest the preoccupations of this Inquiry mark a significant change from the concept that increased affluence means a nation can afford higher education, to the idea that it is higher education that will make a nation affluent.

All university staff are therefore employed in a sector where purpose, value and operation are contested. Institutions are individual, arise from different traditions and compete for resources. They are linked by the name, University, and what that implies to the populations they wish to attract. They are subject to change and to competing demands. To respond to these there have been changes in the population, estate, provision and working practice of universities. These changes have created institutional and interpersonal tensions which are addressed in the following Chapters. While universities are workplaces with particular characteristics and tensions, they are also physical institutions with geographical locations. They are therefore exposed to the more general structural tensions inherent in the employment practices and economic conditions of the locality of each workplace.

1.2 **Structural Tensions – Within Employment**

As employees in England, university staff are situated within a socially stratified, capitalist economy in which occupation and levels of pay are perceived as key determinants of social status. The primary work transaction is the sale or purchase of labour, made explicit in the UK Office of National Statistics definitions of employment relationships.

> "…. employers: who buy the labour of others and assume some degree of authority and control over them, self-employed (or 'own account') workers: who neither buy labour nor sell their labour to others, and employees: who sell their labour to employers"
> (2010, Standard Occupational Classification)

A distinction is drawn between a service relationship in which a salary is exchanged for services, and a labour contract in which quantified work is exchanged for a wage. The interlinked determinants of this contract are price and the degree of control exercised by the buyer over the seller. These are perceived to indicate the status of the work. Occupations are categorised into fifteen categories, arranged in a hierarchy with major employers, senior managerial and professional occupations at the top. Those deemed to be engaged in

routine work, with little autonomy are positioned just above long-term unemployed and full time students at the bottom (Office of National Statistics, 2010). Table 1.1 shows these categories in more detail. The university staff who participated in this research fell into the lower categories of this hierarchy.

In this basic transaction of the sale and purchase of labour there is room for negotiation, exploitation and ambiguity over what is being bought and the terms under which it is sold. Pay and conditions of work in England are regulated as to minimum wage, safety and the prevention of overt discrimination and victimisation. But legislation does not in itself protect people if they lack the capacity to insist on enforcement. Scrutiny by trade unions, government agencies, pressure groups and individual action may not provide adequate protection. Workers in informal, domestic, unpaid, illegal or enforced work are most exposed to abuse. Those people seeking work in locations where it is scarce and those working for secondary employers such as agencies and work gangs are also vulnerable to legal and illegal exploitation. Although catering, caretaking and security work can be located in informal and unregulated workplaces, this research is concerned with people working in a formally structured and regulated organisation. They are paid a pre-determined amount regularly and can join active trade unions. As directly employed workers in the public service sector of the economy they are amongst the best protected. However, even in such well scrutinised workplaces basic protection can be subverted, through structural discrimination and individual aggression.

Table 1.1 – Categories of Employment

Operational categories and sub-categories classes	
L1	Employers in large establishments
L2	Higher managerial and administrative occupations
L3	Higher professional occupations
L4	Lower professional and higher technical occupations
L5	Lower managerial and administrative occupations
L6	Higher supervisory occupations
L7	Intermediate occupations
	L7.1 Intermediate clerical and administrative occupations
	L7.2 Intermediate sales and service occupations
	L7.3 Intermediate technical and auxiliary occupations
	L7.4 Intermediate engineering occupations
L8	Employers in small organisations
	L8.1 Employers in small establishments in industry, commerce, services etc.
	L8.2 Employers in small establishments in agriculture
L9	Own account workers
	L9.1 Own account workers (non-professional)
	L9.2 Own account workers (agriculture)
L10	Lower supervisory occupations
L11	Lower technical occupations
	L11.1 Lower technical craft occupations
	L11.2 Lower technical process operative occupations
L12	Semi-routine occupations
	L12.1 Semi-routine sales occupations
	L12.2 Semi-routine service occupations
	L12.3 Semi-routine technical occupations
	L12.4 Semi-routine operative occupations
	L12.5 Semi-routine agricultural occupations
	L12.6 Semi-routine clerical occupations
	L12.7 Semi routine childcare occupations
L13	Routine occupations
	L13.1 Routine sales and service occupations
	L13.2 Routine production occupations
	L13.3 Routine technical occupations
	L13.4 Routine operative occupations
	L13.5 Routine agricultural occupations
L14	Never worked and long-term unemployed
	L14.1 Never worked
	L14.2 Long-term unemployed
L15	Full-time students

Source: ONS, Table 2 - NS-SEC analytic classes, operational categories and sub-categories

In any place of employment there is a tension between the formal requirements of the employer and the daily reality of the people undertaking the work. No management can control every contingency, no contract of employment or job description can cover every detail. Individual workers may make use of this room to manoeuvre in ways that may promote or resist their employers' interests (Clegg, 1989). To position the experience of university staff within these tensions it is useful to consider briefly contrasting means of theorising work, including aspects of public sector work. A detailed consideration of Universities as employers then follows in Chapter 2.

1.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Work

The sociological study of the dynamics of specific workplaces has followed technological and social developments in the organisation of work (Halford & Strangleman, 2009). Factories attracted initial attention. Gathering workers in one place enabled control of the processes of production. Ethnographic studies in different factories revealed relentless, boring and physically exhausting work (Beynon, 1973; Westwood, 1984; Glucksmann/Cavendish, 2009). Research interest then developed in service industries in which the product is less tangible. Where workers are static, as in call centres, work can be controlled in the same way as on production lines. Again the relentless pace of work was inescapable with the added aggravation of encountering unpleasant behaviour in customers (Mulholland, 2002; Knights, & Mccabe, 1998). Workers may be less physically constrained in service sectors such as leisure and hospitality. A more dispersed workforce may mean that their activities are harder to manage although means of surveillance can be used including customer feedback. Interactions between service workers and customers contain additional elements of work, interpersonal skills and presentation become important and therefore subject to scrutiny (Hochschild, 1983).

Research interest in the public sector has been generated by a political impetus for greater accountability and efficiency resulting in performance targets and internal markets. It is suggested that managers have responded by a process of deskilling and intensification of work (Green, 2001; McHugh & Brennan, 1994). Developments in the manufacturing and services sectors have also given rise to research interest in the work of managerial and professional staff. But amid these changing interests, the role of manual staff in organisations dominated by professionals has received sparse attention.

Work has been considered in two contrasting theoretical strands. As an activity directed and constrained by the structures of society and as part of an individual's construction of a meaningful existence. The first positions work as necessary for survival, structured and collective. It is embedded in an analysis of the economic, political and social systems in which work takes place. In order to live, access to goods and services are necessary. A basic transaction, money in exchange for work, is the primary reason for people to undertake paid work. Employers must attract and retain a workforce in the prevailing economic conditions so the terms offered relate to the supply of labour. The local economy and job market therefore affect the amount of choice that people have in an employer. Social and educational background also determines the type of work they have access to. Once at work other questions then arise such as who controls the allocation of tasks, to what end, and to whose benefit?

Marx positioned work in an inevitable conflict between workers and owners of capital in an industrial economy. Profit requires highest productivity with lowest production costs. Workers desire increasing wages, continuity of work and control over pace of work. Employers desire reduced wage costs, flexibility of work and highest productivity. Workplace relationships are therefore inherently unequal, unstable and antagonistic. It is in the interests of the employer to extract the maximum work from the labour time and capacity allocated by the worker.

Deploying the work effectively is the purpose of management (Thompson & Smith, 2010). Edwards (2010) defines this labour process as:

> "…. that activity in which the capacity to work is turned into concrete labour, together with the relevant relations between managers and workers" (p.32)

Braverman's (1974) classic study elegantly describes the process of seeking to reduce the pay and power of the workforce by reducing skill levels. By breaking jobs into elements requiring little skill, people become interchangeable and replaceable. The profit imperative therefore drives a systematic fragmentation of task, reducing the exercise of individual skill and autonomy. However, the capacity to work is embodied in mobile and individual workers inhabiting a specific time and place. Within a collective enterprise, specific work activities are carried out by individual people. In this theoretical strand, discussion of work relations gives prominence to disparity in power with mechanisms of intentional control and resistance. Worker autonomy is considered as collective or individual action within a workplace dynamic of exploitation and resistance. Resistance can be explicit and covert. Withdrawal of labour is the most public, strikes, pickets and demonstrations attract attention outside the workplace but with serious costs to participants. Intensification of work can be resisted by 'working to rule', adhering to exact contractual arrangements. 'Go slow' action reduces the pace of work without stoppage and consequent loss of wages. Attempts to ameliorate the relentless pace of work can result in ingenuous means of stretching jobs out or evading tasks (Glucksmann, 2009; Toynbee, 2003; Beynon, 1973). Withdrawal of goodwill can result in evasion of tasks, sloppy work and absenteeism. Sabotage and theft directly attack an employers production costs.

Managers may attempt to control this behaviour through inducements and sanctions. Payment methods such as commission, piecework and pay docking are deployed accompanied by monitoring and surveillance. Attempts may be made to harness aspects of people's beliefs to increase efficiency and reduce turnover (Morrison, Burke & Greene, 2007; Toynbee, 2003). To ease the tension of this relationship there can be paternalistic behaviour from management and tacit complicity in some working practices. Westwood (1984) describes time, materials and machinery being appropriated in workers' social traditions and rituals, with managerial collusion. These uneasy employment relationships occur within constraining structures of employment law, contractual arrangements, and worker collectives.

This perspective of the workplace dynamic provides a framework for the examination of structural relationships between staff in stratified workplaces and an understanding of the structural context of work. It does not address the individual subjective experience of operating within these structures (Thompson & Vincent 2010). Spencer (2000), reviewing the labour process debate, identified major criticisms concerning the focus on the structures of work relations rather than the contribution of individual subjective responses to working practices.

An omission from this theoretical strand is adequate attention to the place of pleasure in work. The building of pleasurable social relationships and the use of humour are presented within the tension of exploitation and individual or communal reaction. Consequently the focus is on the value of group cohesion and solidarity in coping with the alienating nature of work and problematic interactions (Watts, 2007; Korczynski, 2003; Taylor & Bain, 2003). The lack of attention to pleasure may be wider than within the study of work, Veenhoven (2008) suggests the disciplinary preoccupations of sociology itself are those aspects of social organisations that are problematic.

The second theoretical strand positions employment as one role in life among others. Work may have differing importance at different times in a person's life. The emphasis is on the individual worker, their personal motivation and perceptions of their experience and

autonomous actions. Further motivations to employment are suggested, work as a contribution to a fundamental human need for meaning (Frankl 2000; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008); as a place for social relationships vital for mental health (Layard, 2005); a spiritual practice (Morrison, Burke et al, 2007) and a religious duty (Watson, 1980; Prasad, 1925). Paid work allows access to goods and services through which identity can be created and so is important for the social engagement of individuals. It can be perceived as a response to a culturally imposed concept of social duty (Noon & Blyton, 2007). Individuals therefore approach employment with various motivations arising from beliefs and values developed outside work which will affect their approach to work activities and relations (Levy-Leboyer, 1988). There is also the possibility that there is no meaning. If work is needed for survival and requires a significant amount of time to be spent in employment, workers may create meaning in order to tolerate it (Noon & Blyton, 2007).

A means of bridging the polarised debate between structural determinants of work and individual subjective experience is offered by Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001). They consider an individual's capacity to craft their experience of work within structural constraints. They suggest workers may assert control over their work, to increase its meaning and satisfy a need for connection with others. It is suggested that the more controlled the job the greater the need to adapt it informally. It is within this concept that the work of catering, caretaking and security staff in universities is considered in this thesis.

1.4. **Work in the Public Sector**

The structural relations of the university workplace are located in a contested operational definition. Whether universities are primarily a private enterprise, a public sector institution or an organisation responding to a variety of stakeholders is debated (Hussey & Smith, 2010). While it is arguable whether universities are essentially public sector organisations, there is agreement they are required to deliver Government educational policies and derive much of their income from public funds. Many of their activities are commercial but for much of their operation a requirement for profit, creating the basic tension of extracting the most work for least money does not apply. The providers of capital, tax payers, via Government

bodies are expecting service provision rather than financial return. There is resistance to higher education being perceived as the provision of a service because it positions students as recipients rather than collaborators. However, for the purpose of considering work relations, it is considered there are sufficient factors aligning universities with trends in the public sector (Deem, 1998). With acknowledgment of the contested nature of the university sector, they will be considered here as public institutions. Over half of the sector's income, at the time of this study, comes from public finances, in return for which it is expected to provide educational, economic and social benefits. Capacity is dictated by political policy and may bear little relation to supply and demand.

The terms and conditions of public sector staff have maintained some protection, evidenced by reductions in terms and conditions when work is outsourced. Work relations are characterised by strong Trade Unions and national bargaining which is not the case in other, commercially owned service industries. It is suggested, however, that important aspects of traditional expectations of job security, incremental pay increases and clear promotion paths have been challenged. Restructuring, outsourcing and redundancies have undermined the tacit contract that managers and staff are engaged in a joint enterprise (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). Consideration of the experience of work in the public sector tends to focus on changes in structure, task and status rather than the underlying dynamics arising between different groups of staff theoretically engaged in collaborating to offer a public service.

Much of public sector work is engaged in offering services. The freedom of movement necessary in some service work means workers can be more difficult to control. Unpredictable interactions with service users can require a degree of autonomy (Patterson, Hawe, Clarke, Krause, van Dijk, Penman, Shiell, 2009). However, in service work control can be extended to more intimate arenas. The demeanour of the worker is an important part of service transactions, with their social capacity being valuable to the employer (Thompson & Smith, 2010). The appropriation and manipulation of workers' emotions for the benefit of the employer has raised concerns (Hochschild, 1983). Bolton (2009) discusses emotional engagement as a further aspect of labour power, along with skill

and knowledge. This work is not necessarily paid for or reflected in the work hierarchy, creating another form of work intensification (Thompson & Smith 2010). More flexible behaviour from managers may be required to elicit this work as they seek to engage co-operation and pro-active behaviours.

The work of manual staff within public sector workplaces in the UK is sparsely researched. Literature concerned with low paid work identifies structural problems associated with precarious work: low skill levels; the need to hold multiple jobs; transport problems; finding adequate dependent care; poor accommodation and exploitation. The potential for exhaustion, injury and long-term health problems associated with physical work has been identified. Hourly pay may result in unpaid time during split shifts or in necessary activities such as changing into and out of uniforms. In occupations with a seasonal workload there may be parts of the year with no pay. Toynbee (2003) spent time as an agency worker with catering staff in a school. She identified hard, physical work at a pace close to impossible. This was undertaken by efficient, experienced core staff, assisted by a succession of agency workers. The core workers respected each other and took pride in their capacity. Their work had intensified as other services closed and the work was reallocated, with little extra pay or allocation of time. The only respite they could create for themselves was to slightly manipulate their routine by periods of frenetic activity.

Hospitals could be considered to have some similarities with university workplaces. They have a large transient population serviced by various occupation groups with differing status relative to the core purpose of the service. Toynbee (2003) also worked briefly as a hospital porter employed through an agency. She described ancillary staff as transitory and, individually, unimportant to the hospital. There was no training because there was an assumption of a transitory workforce. Younger porters were hoping for other jobs in the future, older workers had experience in other work in other employment sectors. They experienced rude and denigrating behaviour from staff in other occupations groups including being ignored, alongside some friendly and helpful behaviour. Work had intensified as porter numbers reduced while patient throughput rose. Porters had developed ways of taking a hidden break while maintaining an accepted rate of work. There was an informal agreement

to stretch each task slightly to resist work being allocated at the fastest rate possible. The speed of work threatened human contact, holding a frightened patient's hand took time. There was conflict between their concern, as people, and the job regulations. An example was whether to help a fallen patient up or leave them on the floor because of threatened sanctions for doing something outside the insurance cover. There were no promotion prospects, a slight increase of pay for jobs such as supervisor but not sufficient to exchange for the freedom of walking round the hospital. Some aspects of the work were satisfying there were moments of social interactions with patients who talked of families and worries. As mobile staff, porters got to know what was happening in the organisation which was interesting and useful. There was camaraderie within the work group with laughter and play, although this could move to bullying.

In considering universities as public sector service workplaces, there are factors that distinguish them from other populated institutions such as schools and hospitals. The majority, transient population, is adult. Individuals within this population attend institutions over several years. Students have a complex organisational role as workforce, customers, service users and junior members. The work of university staff therefore takes place in organisations characterised by an unusual set of employment relationships. A workforce of students who pay to attend is managed by staff, paid to work. The successful engagement of both groups is essential to the survival of each institution. The dyadic relationship of academic staff and students has received most research attention, yet universities are also populated by other groups and they are physical places.

University staff work in a substantial sector, in the year 2009-2010 Higher Education Institutions in the UK employed over half a million people. Universities are dependent on their workforce to provide services directly to individual and corporate customers and students. They are labour intensive organisations, spending £14.6 billion on staff costs, 56.8% of their total expenditure of £25.9 billion. This employment sector is growing, in England, between 2005 and 2010 there was a 9.2% rise in staffing and an increase in spending from £16 billion to £21.5 billion (Higher Education Statistics Agency, HESA, (2011). Universities have an economic and social impact on their locality beyond their role as an

employer. Their operation requires the purchase of supplies and equipment which may benefit local business. Their infrastructure requires construction, maintenance and repair services beyond the remit of their workforce. The students and staff who gather there spend money in the local area, on accommodation, entertainment and shopping for personal and academic necessities and pleasures. The marketing of university estates and facilities attract leisure and business visitors. University staff establish enterprises, engage with Local Authority projects and businesses and many students work in the local economy. A report compiled for Universities UK calculated this financial impact for the year 2003-2004. University spend on goods and services produced in the UK was estimated at £15.4 billion. Direct expenditure by international students alone was calculated at £2.55 billion. International visitors were estimated to spend £185.98 million in the country while staying on university estates. This expenditure had a knock-on effect in both jobs and business output in the country. It was calculated that one hundred university jobs sustained ninety-nine full time equivalent jobs elsewhere. Each £1 million of higher education institution output created £1.5 million in other enterprises (Universities UK, 2006). Whilst such calculations are open to criticism, the economic impact of these large institutions will be of significance to their locality. In the next Chapter these social organisations, operating within physical estates, are considered as places of work.

This thesis is organised in seven further chapters. Chapter 2 considers the university workplace. Chapter 3 addresses the work relations that arise in these settings. In Chapter 4 the research design and procedure is described. Chapter 5 presents perspectives on the workplace, work conditions and work activities of the catering, caretaking and security staff in one university. Chapter 6 considers insights into the attitudes towards work and to the unstructured interactions with students of these staff. In Chapter 7 the contribution of these staff to the social and learning aspects of university life is discussed. The concluding chapter summarises the case study and considers the insight gained into the work of these staff and their contribution to the functioning of the university in which they are employed.

Chapter 2 –Work in Universities

This thesis is about workers in universities, but not those most usually considered. The focus is the manual staff positioned in the lower grades of the university hierarchy, in particular the caretaking, catering and security staff. Institutions generally and universities in particular, depend on manual staff whose organisational invisibility is often matched by their invisibility in the debates about the nature of work in professional dominated organisations. The physical nature of such institutions gives rise to social relations in specific places.

As universities have grown in number and size they have become significant workplaces in their localities. They are traditionally the work location of academics. Naturally the attention of some has been drawn to their own environment and universities now figure as objects of academic research, journalism and literature. However, the perspectives offered in this discussion are surprisingly narrow. This can be a literature by academics about academic concerns and values and the processes of academic labour. The physical existence of universities can be overlooked, yet university estates and populations must be supported and these functions give rise to a differentiated workforce. The social interactions and activities of thousands of people take place on university estates. The scale and composition of this population and the estates in which they gather has been subject to change, creating structural tensions affecting the work of university staff. In this section these changes are reviewed and the employment conditions of university occupation groups introduced. Debated tensions within working practices and the use of the infrastructure are briefly considered in order to establish the context for a discussion of work relations in the following Chapter.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) defines a University as:

> "The whole body of teachers and scholars engaged, at a particular place, in giving and receiving instruction in the higher branches of learning…"

Changes in the size and constituents of the staff and student population have affected the size and usage of the particular place, the university estate. More than 80 universities in

England currently accommodate around 2.5 million students, employ nearly 400,000 staff operating in 13,153 buildings on 521 sites covering 28 square miles excluding residential areas. The largest population groups in universities are students and staff. The numbers of each group have undergone rapid, but uneven, growth involving changes in composition. Increased student places have not been accompanied by commensurate increases in staff numbers. There has been a move away from full-time, often residential, study and a growth in part-time employment. This has been accompanied by increases in the size of estates and their locations. Together, these changes have created a large, fragmented and dispersed university population.

These changes and the effect on parts of the staff population are well documented. There is a large body of academic commentary and research concerned with work in the universities. Governments have commissioned inquiries to inform policy and legislation. Trade Unions have surveyed their members, publishing some of the results. The population, purpose, funding and value of universities have been debated over decades, reignited by successive regulatory change. Inquiry reports preceding legislation have served to focus these debates, although their reactive nature has tended to encourage polarised positions. Amidst this wealth of information the physical nature of universities has received little attention and the occupations of catering, caretaking and security staff appear rarely.

2.1 **Structural Conditions**

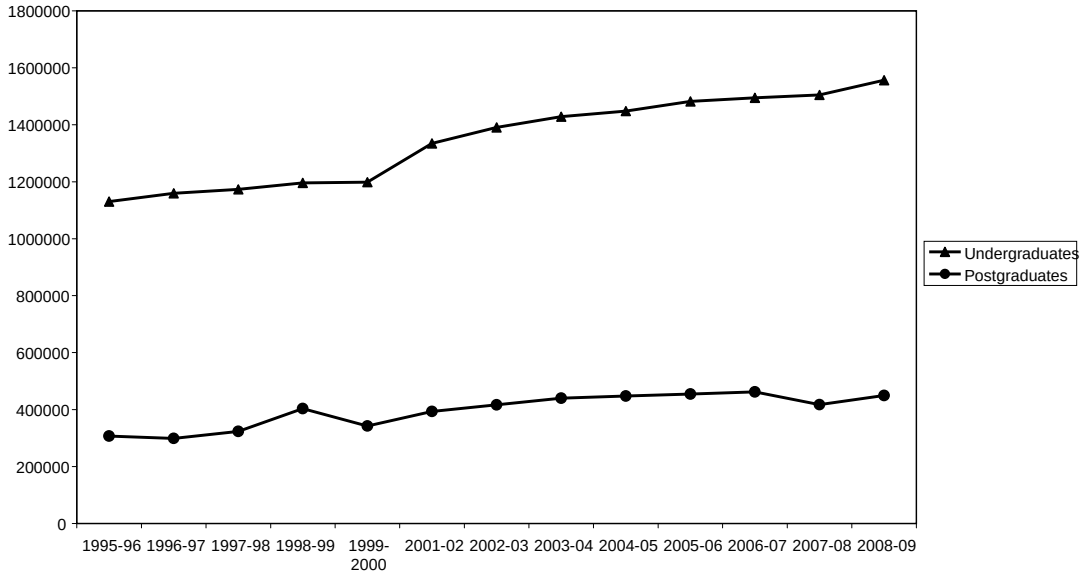
Changes in the organisation of the sector have resulted in the merger of institutions. The binary system of autonomous universities and public sector polytechnics decreased sector diversity. Before 1968 higher education in England comprised a variety of institutions: Universities; Colleges of Advanced Technology; Polytechnics; regional and local Technical Colleges; Art Colleges; Teacher Training Colleges; Medical Colleges; Nursing Colleges, all offering different awards and modes of provision. After 1968, Polytechnics absorbed the art, technical and nursing colleges and most of the teaching colleges. Medical colleges, Colleges of Advanced Technology and some teaching colleges joined or became universities (Stevens, 2005; Smith, 1983; Matterson, 1981). Specialist university colleges, such as those

for drama, music, agriculture, law and accounting are independent and able to award degrees. Throughout this period of restructuring, entry criteria, duration of study, types of award and the demarcation between advanced, further and higher education have changed. Data repositories contain a wealth of information but calculating sector expansion is complex, with changes in institutional descriptions, definitions of students and recording of statistics, but the overall trend is clear.

2.1.1 Students

Figure 2.1 shows the continuing rise in student numbers since 1995, with undergraduate numbers rising most steeply.

Figure 2.1 - Higher Education Students in England 1995 to 2009



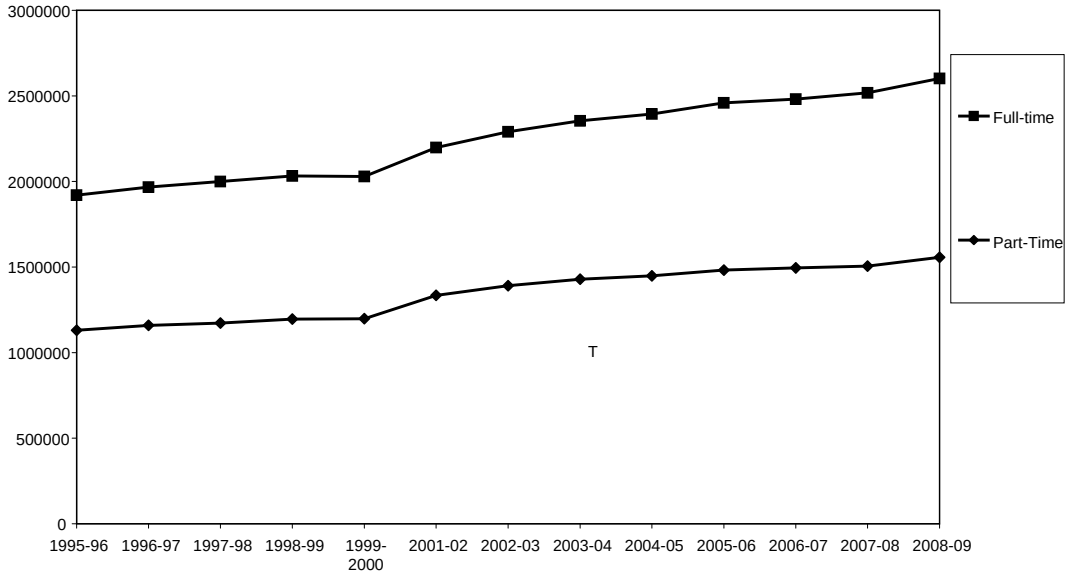
Source: Author's calculation from HESA publications (various)

The scale of the expansion is dramatic with 216,000 full-time higher education students in 1962-63 in Great Britain ('Robbins', 1963) to 2,553,250 in the UK in 2009-2010 (HESA, 2011). Distribution has been uneven, creating universities with widely different student populations ranging from 5,000 to 35,000 (HESA, 2011).

The rate of expansion has not been constant. Between 1980 and 1993, full time equivalent student places rose by around 77%, from 638,250 to 1,128,000 (Lindsay & Rodgers, 1998). This expansion was frozen in the 1990s (Centre for Higher Education Studies, 1994), with a spike in growth following the removal of the cap on student numbers following 'Dearing' recommendations in 1997.

The increase has been possible by drawing on a wider social base, with the student body becoming more diverse and fragmented. Universities traditionally relied on school leavers for student recruitment. This has changed with a move from the admission of 6% of young people ('Robbins', 1963) to a target of 50% aged 18-30 by 2010 (hefce, 2008). About half of undergraduates are aged over 21 when they start at university ('Milburn', 2009; hefce, 2008). Older students are more likely to have employment and social responsibilities and to study part-time. Figure 2.2 shows the rise in part-time undergraduates since 1995, which mirror that of full-time. The term full-time may be misleading, many students enrolled on full-time courses will also have jobs.

Figure 2.2 - Higher Education Undergraduates England 1995 to 2009

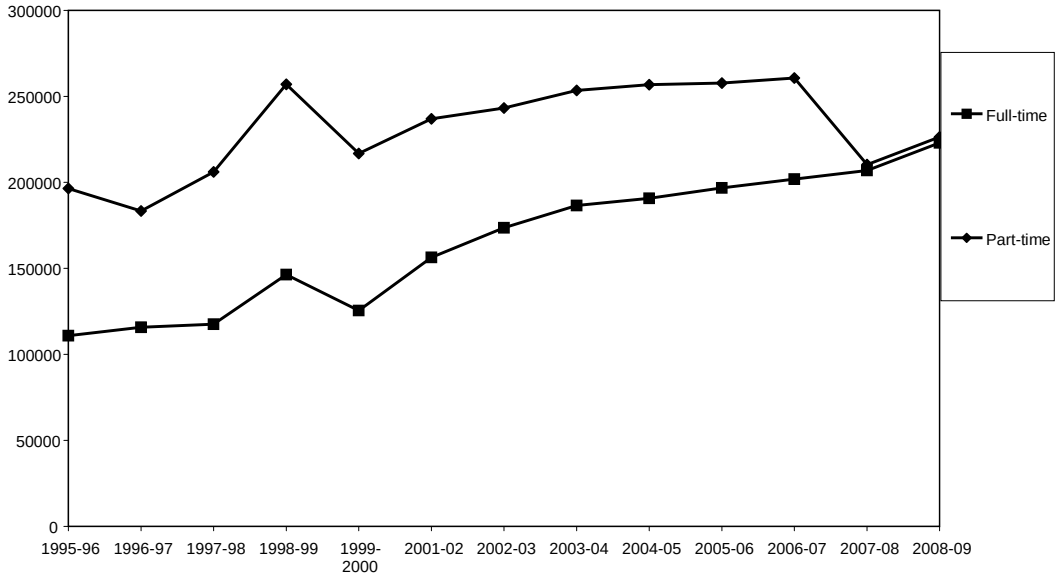


Source: Author's calculation from HESA publications (various)

Post-graduate studies are more likely to be part-time. Figure 2.3 shows the modes of study for postgraduates over the last 15 years. Whilst the two modes of study still mirror each

other in pattern, the comparative rise in postgraduate part-time study is faster than that for undergraduates. About 30% of undergraduates and 48% of postgraduates are now part-time, with differing levels of engagement with their universities.

Figure 2.3 - Higher Education Postgraduates England 1995 to 2009



Source: Author's calculation from HESA publications (various)

The social and economic background of this larger body of students and how this relates to which universities they attend is debated. The polarities are clear; people from the most affluent neighbourhoods are reported as being six times more likely to attend university than those from the least affluent (hefce, 2008). For those whose circumstances are less far apart the situation is less clear, although there is consensus on disproportionate benefit to more affluent families. An Inquiry into social mobility found the half of young people in England who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds only provide 29% of students, with parental occupation being an indicator. Young people whose parents had professional jobs were three times as likely to attend university as those whose parents were from other occupations ('Milburn', 2009). Despite this disparity, there has been scope for new entrant groups to take up university places, many attending their local universities (Blanden & Machin, 2004). The admission of students from more sections of the population has been welcomed by some on the grounds of social justice and the need for a well educated workforce. Others have been concerned over the devaluation of the degree, inappropriate

provision and the need to adapt course levels to avoid non-completion (Maskell & Robinson, 2002). Early fears that such students would lack social and verbal skills and be vocationally orientated were assuaged by the expectation that they would go to the new Universities (Halsey, 1958). This expectation seems justified, only 16% of students at the Russell Group universities are from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Milburn, 2009). The trend is towards it becoming less likely that people from low income backgrounds will attend the highest status universities (BIS, 2011).

A much enlarged student body, studying part or full time, more diverse as to age and external commitments, encounter a fragmented workforce. Staff are divided by job security, level of engagement and occupational status.

2.1.2 Staff

Universities are labour intensive workplaces. Table 2.1 shows that staff costs are gradually reducing from a peak of nearly 60% of total expenditure.

Table 2.1 – UK Higher Education Institutions – Staffing

Year	Staff Costs £ thousands	% of total Expenditure
2009/10	14,642,901	56.70
2008/09	14,169,005	56.80
2007/08	13,135,202	57.40
2006/07	12,156,285	57.80
2005/06	11,194,007	57.80
2004/05	10,461,801	58.20
2003/04	9,749,960	58.50
2002/03	9,032,522	58.40
2001/02	8,371,003	58.00

Table excludes staff with no direct employment contract with a university
Source: Author's calculation from HESA publications (various)

This workforce is stratified by occupational status and fragmented by mode of employment and location. People are employed directly, through agencies or are self employed. They occupy posts with a variety of functions, on a wide range of contracts. Pay rates range from near the national minimum wage to salaries amongst top earnings in the country.

At the time of this study there was a national bargaining structure for negotiations on sector pay for the majority of higher education staff. The Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff (JNCHES) comprised the Universities and Colleges Employers Association and staff Trade Unions. Union membership reflected occupational divisions, with the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) and Educational Institute of Scotland for academic, academic support and managerial staff. UNISON, UNITE and GMB represented administrative, clerical, technical and manual staff. This negotiating committee was established in 2001 following the recommendations of the Independent Review of Higher Education Pay and Conditions ('Bett'), reporting in 1999. It replaced ten separate structures, with the specific intent of establishing parity across the sector. The workforce was considered in two sections, academic and non-academic, with separate sub-councils and separate pay scales. A linked pay spine was introduced in 2004 and a pay settlement was agreed in 2006. National pay agreements are not mandatory, although the majority of universities do apply them. There has been some division over whether academic and professional staff should continue to collaborate with other groups in the negotiating bodies (UNISON, 2009; UNISON, 2010; JNCHES, 2008). Senior managers and professors are exempt from these arrangements, with less transparency over their pay and contracts which are determined by each university.

Tracking changes in staffing levels over time is complicated by the structural changes in the sector. Further complications arise from changes in the treatment of staff with short-term and low-activity contracts. Headcount and full-time equivalent figures are difficult to compare across time. Some occupations are omitted in the presentation of statistics, Higher Education Statistics Agency on-line statistics for "*all staff*" actually refer only to academic staff. Enquiries elicited the information that statistics on other occupations were only collected in aggregate form before 2003. A requirement for full details was then introduced for equal opportunity reasons but these figures are still not published alongside those for academic staff. The Higher Education Funding Council groups staff into various classifications of academic work, less detailed categories of professionals and administrators, with a further group of 'Other'.

Table 2.2 shows the basic division of academic staff to non-academic staff with academics being 47% of the workforce. There is a roughly even distribution of part-time and full-time work.

Table 2.2 – English Higher Education Institution Academic and Non-Academic Staff 2008-2009

Primary Work Designation	Staff Total	Full-Time		Part-Time	
		Headcount	%	Headcount	%
Total Staff	387,430	253,970		133,465	
Academic	181,595	117,930	65	63,665	35
Total Non Academic	205,835	136,040	66	69,800	40

Source: Author's compilation from Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010)

Categorisation into academic and non-academic is not helpful in considering the stratification of university workplaces. It conceals ambiguity of role, level of qualification and occupational status.

Table 2.3 gives the occupational breakdown of the 53% of non-academic staff, with managers and technicians being most likely to have full-time contracts.

Table 2.3 – English Higher Education Institution Non-Academic Occupation Groups 2008-2009

Primary Work Designation	Staff Total	Full-Time		Part-Time	
		Headcount	%	Headcount	%
Total Non Academic	205,835	136,040	66	69,800	40
Managerial, Professional, Technical	89,195	71,430	80	17,765	20
Clerical	73,630	44,135	60	29,500	40
Manual	43,005	20,475	48	22,535	52

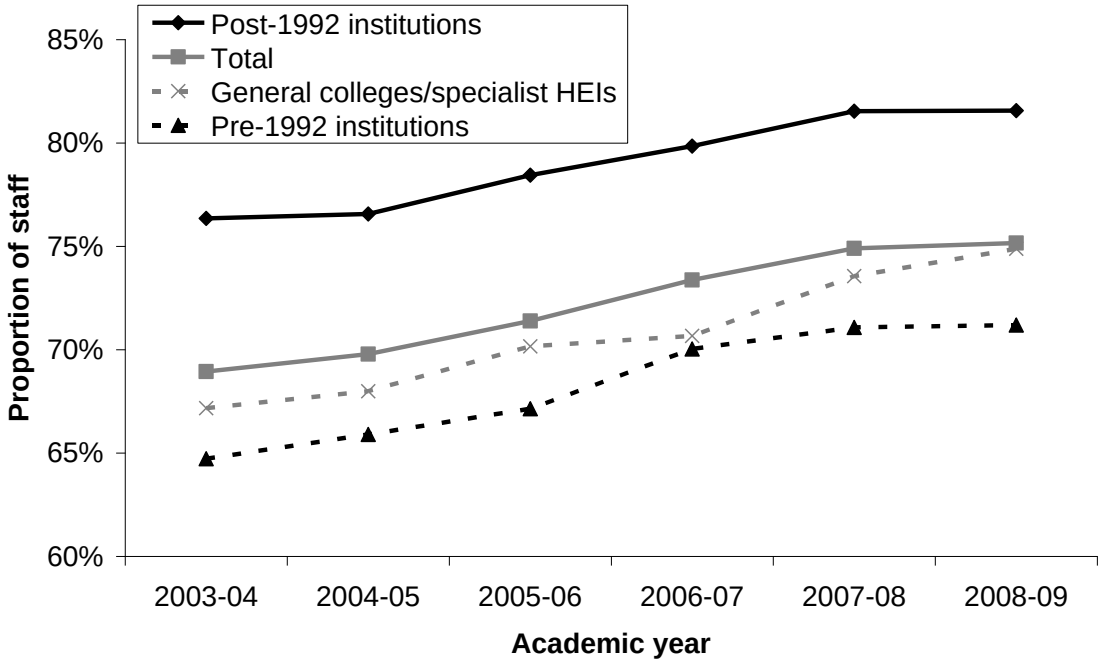
Source: Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010)

Other than a working pattern of full or part time work, staff have working arrangements specifically related to the nature of university activities.

2.1.2.1 Contracts

Varied work activities within universities are undertaken by staff employed on a variety of contracts. The academic calendar presents foreseeable periods of high activity. Commercial activities require flexible staffing for specific events as they arise. Staffing capacity required at different times is reflected in contracts of employment. Figure 2.4 shows that permanent contracts are not distributed evenly across the sector or within institutions. A higher use of permanent contracts in ex-polytechnics derives from their Local Authority history.

Figure 2.4 - Proportion of staff on permanent contracts by type of institution



Source: Staff employed at HEFCE-funded HEIs (hefce, 2008, Figure 11, p.24)

The divisions in the university workforce are reflected in the diversity of employment contracts. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (2009) describes permanent, fixed-term and atypical contracts. Permanent academic staff are an aging occupation group, with only 2% aged below thirty and 68% between forty and sixty. This contrasts with the age profile of all staff with 16% being under thirty and 49% between forty and sixty (HESA, 2011). Younger people are managing insecure employment with 49% of those on atypical contracts being under thirty and only 27% being between forty and sixty. Permanent contracts are more likely to be full-time with 86% of permanent academic staff being full-time and a smaller percentage, 64% of professional and support staff.

The duration of a contract does not necessarily indicate a time-limited engagement with a university as fixed-term contracts can be continually repeated. One person may hold multiple contracts for different tasks in one or more university, creating wide variations between the staff headcount and calculated full-time equivalents. Staff may also work with no direct employment contract with the university. This presents a picture of a fragmented workforce and prevents calculation of the physical presence of staff in university premises.

Contract content in respect of conditions of employment further segregates the workforce. They reflect the distinction between a loose salaried service relationship and a more specific labour contract. In 2008, the working week for most staff was specified at between 36 and 37 hours per week, the national norm. Forty-five percent of higher education institutions did not specify contractual hours of work for academic staff. This may disguise the actual hours academics work, estimated at over 50 hours per week (Tight, 2009). Leave entitlement, where given, for academic staff averaged 35 days a year in contrast to 25 days for other staff (JNCHES, 2008). Contract type and pattern of work form two parts of the employment relationship. The third is pay.

2.1.2.2 Pay

Pay is seen as central to employment. Pay differentials indicate occupational status and may reveal social position. In universities the range of pay is from wages near the minimum wage to salaries close to £300,000. Table 2.4 shows the pay bands for the majority of higher education staff in 2008-09.

Table 2.4 - Staff in English Higher Education Institutions by Annual Salary

	2008-09	
Salary band	Number of staff	%
£10,000 and below	1,370	0%
£10,001 to £20,000	54,770	18%
£20,001 to £30,000	76,400	25%
£30,001 to £40,000	77,310	26%
£40,001 to £50,000	49,880	17%
£50,001 to £60,000	23,165	8%
£60,001 to £70,000	7,285	2%
£70,001 and above	11,170	4%
Total with known salary	301,355	100%
Salary not known	13,605	
Total	314,960	

Note: excludes staff with atypical contracts

Source: Staff employed at HEFCE-funded HEIs (hefce, Table B6 p.61 extract)

Pay arrangements for senior staff are less clear, with considerable additional benefits to a basic salary. University status affects this remuneration package, the Russell Group were reportedly paid the most at an average £270,579 with the 1994 Group at £247,798. University Alliance at 222,460 were close to Million + at £214,695 followed by the non-aligned group at £205,411 in 2008-09. Twelve institutions are known to have paid vice-chancellors over £300,000 (Fearn & Morgan, 2010). The superior status of academics in universities is reflected in their pay. The median salary for teaching academic staff was some £43,000 in 2008-09. For professional and support staff the median was nearly £28,000. This contrasts with national median annual earnings of £25,000 (ASHE, 2008). Staff on atypical contracts may be paid a fixed fee for a specific piece of work. Table 2.6 shows pay settlements between 2001 and 2008. Pay rises in recent years have rectified a lack of parity with other employment sectors, higher education staff now earning 5-10% more than similar jobs elsewhere (JNCHES, 2008). The occupation groups that are the concern of this thesis fall into the 18% of staff earning below £20,000.

Table 2.6 - HE Pay Settlements in Summary, 2001 to 2008

2001	Introduction of interim single pay spine alongside existing pay scales.
	Academics. Pre-92 academic staff 3% from 1 April + 1% from 1 September. Post-92 academic staff 2.25% from 1 September + 2% from 1 February 2002
	Support staff agreement 3% from 1 April + 1% from 1 September 2001 + 1% from 1 March 2002. For manual and ancillary staff £560 flat rate increase from 1 April for pre-92 and £420 from 1 September for post-92
2002	Academics received 3.2 % from 1 August. Bottom points removed from lecturer scale. Support staff received 3.2% - 5% from 1 August. Larger increases at the bottom of the pay spine. Average increase 3.5% apart from some manual staff who averaged 4.3%
2003	Academics 3.44% from 1 August 2003; 1st stage of 2 year agreement
	Support staff 3.44% from 1 August 2003 with larger increases for the lowest paid giving up to 8.1%. 1st stage of 2 year agreement.
2004	Academics and Support Staff 3%. 2nd stage of 2003 agreement from 1 August 2004. Staff begin to migrate to new 51 point pay spine under the Framework Agreement
2005	Academics 3% from 1 August 2005
	Support Staff 3% for salaries above £13,200pa. 3.2 – 4.8% for those on the lowest grades through lump sum increases (£500 - £400 depending on salary level)
2006	Academics and support staff. Greater of 3% or £515 from 1 August + 1% from 1 February 2007. 1st stage of 3 year deal
2007	Academics and Support Staff. 3% from 1 August + greater of 3% or £420 from May 2008. 2nd stage of 3 year deal
2008	Academics and Support Staff. 5% from 1 October 2008. 3rd and final stage of 2006 agreement

Source: JNCHES Review of Higher Education Finance and Pay Data (2008 Table 5.3 p.69)

Table 2.7 shows pay for staff other than academic between 2003-2004 and 2006-07, under standard occupational classifications. To address the scarcity of information on support staff the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff commissioned this information so it cannot therefore be currently updated. The increase for the lowest paid staff, who are the focus for this research, has been greater than for other groups through an additional flat rate increase. The lowest spine point increased by between 37% and 46% between 2001 and 2008, with the National Minimum Wage increasing by 9.7% in the same period (JNCHES, 2008).

Table 2.7 Full-time Support Staff Median Salaries 2003/04 – 2006/07

Group	2003/04 £	2004/05 £	2005/06 £	2006/07 £	Change (%)
Managers	34,838	35,979	37,643	38,772	11.3
Non academic professionals	29,128	29,130	31,525	32,471	11.5
Laboratory, engineering, building, IT and medical technicians (including nurses)	21,010	22,111	22,776	24,161	15.0
Student welfare workers, careers advisers, vocational training instructors, personnel and planning officers	23,643	24,820	25,633	27,193	15.0
Artistic, media, public, relations, marketing and sports occupations	21,852	22,507	23,895	24,886	18.5
Library assistants, clerks and general administrative assistants	16,945	17,453	18,517	19,443	14.7
Secretaries, typists, receptionists and telephonists	16,458	16,946	17,977	18,517	15.8
Chefs, gardeners, electrical and construction trades, mechanical fitters and printers	16,284	16,946	17,905	18,701	14.8
Caretakers, residential wardens, sports and leisure attendants, nursery nurses and care occupations	13,285	14,040	14,618	15,571	17.2
Retail and customer service occupations	15,131	15,973	16,946	17,461	15.4
Drivers, maintenance supervisors and plant operatives	14,917	16,773	17,437	18,517	24.1
Cleaners, catering assistants, security officers, porters and maintenance workers	11,580	12,150	13,009	14,041	21.3
All Groups	19,042	19,614	21,212	22,332	17.3

Source: JNCHES Review of Higher Education Finance and Pay Data, 2008 (Table 5.14 p.84)

The remuneration of university staff is currently being threatened and resisted with industrial action (Morgan, 2011). There has been some outsourcing of work within the sector, contributing towards the image of a sector under pressure. However, staff are partly protected. The educational status of universities means they can recover VAT at 17.5% on their operational purchases, creating a cost hurdle which makes outsourcing unattractive (UNISON, 2010).

2.1.3 Estate

> "…. most studies of teaching and learning in higher education focus on the cognitive and sociological aspects of the process, rather taking for granted the physical environment in which these processes take place". (Barnett & Temple, 2006 p.11)

The rapid expansion of student numbers, course provision and staffing has been accommodated in an increased number of universities. This was accomplished by the re-designation and expansion of existing institutions and the creation of new ones. By 2008 there were 86 Universities in England of which 85 received public funding. Of these 68 were created after 1960, 50 in the last 20 years. Table 2.8 gives a breakdown of this development.

Table 2.8 – Pattern of Establishment of English Universities to 2008

Period	Type of University	Number
1100-1836	Medieval	2
1836-1900	Victorian	3
1900-1910	Redbrick (Civic)	5
1910-1945	Redbrick (Civic)	1
1945-1960	Redbrick (Civic) 2nd Wave	6
1960-1970	Plateglass (Campus)	18
1970-1990	Open University (distance learning) Buckingham University (private)	
1992	Polytechnics became Universities	32
2000 – 2008	Latest wave designated University	18
2004	UMIST and Manchester merged	-1

Source: complied by author

The age of the university estate reflects this development with 23% of non-residential buildings built before 1940. More than 40% dates from the 1960s and 1970s and 25% has been built since 1980, only about 4% has been built since 2004 (hefce, 2011). These physical sites are sufficiently important for universities to be commonly characterised by location and architectural style which tend to denote status. Acquisitions and mergers by different institutions have left a heritage of disparate buildings spread over several sites for many universities. One, the Open University, operates without a physical campus for students.

When there were few universities, living and working in the same place was practically necessary. The geographical spread of this larger number of universities has accommodated part-time and local students, eroding the residential model. Providing a physical place for people to come together to work and learn is suggested as the only remaining justification for universities (Smith & Webster, 1997). Attendance enables students to be socialised into disciplinary cultures by seniors in the field (Newman, 2000; Clegg, 2003). It allows for discussion and cross-disciplinary contact that cannot happen elsewhere in a society lacking public space (Kumar, 1997). Cardinal Newman in his classic

discussion of “The Idea of a University” in 1854 expressed the hope that if scholars from different disciplines were exposed to each other in one physical place, they would:

> “…. learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes…” Newman (1996, p.77)

Students can be exposed to information beyond their subject content by the interaction between the place and its function.

> “The hidden curriculum in part is transmitted tacitly by the architecture, by the structuring of time, by the teaching style and by the organisation of knowledge.” (Hartley, 1995 p.415)

An opposing view emphasises the logistical and financial benefits of electronic course provision. Global access to prestigious staff and teaching materials is available on the internet (‘Milburn’, 2009). On-line environments such as Second Life offer the possibility of attending virtual universities. A combined model is offered by the Open University, its distance learning students having an option of occasional physical attendance on the estates of other institutions (Open University, 2011). Meanwhile, whatever the advantages and disadvantages, most university staff and students do gather on university estates.

In 2008-09 University premises had a total internal area of 10 square miles with an insurance replacement value of £60.6 billion and total costs of about £5.5 billion, roughly 10% of their income (hefce, 2011). Long-term underfunding and old buildings meant many university estates were in poor repair and unable to meet modern requirements for access and safety when assessed in 2002. It was calculated that £5 billion of investment was required to refurbish, modernise or replace buildings (hefce, 2002). Between 2000 and 2009 the Higher Education Funding Council for England reported “unprecedented capital investment in the UK higher education estate” (hefce, 2011 p.3) with a 13% increase in buildings of an

acceptable standard by 2009. However, this was patchy, 22 institutions having more than 50% of their space still in poor condition. Given the scale of investment there is a perplexing lack of attention to the interaction between physical environment, population and activity. There is an assumed link between the quality of the environment, teaching, learning and the recruitment and retention of staff and students (hefce, 2011). Whilst this seems likely, there is little research into whether or how this is the case (Temple, 2008).

One attempt to establish a connection between perceived quality of new buildings and the recruitment and retention of staff and students was made in 2003 (CABE, 2005). Five sites were selected and visited, a questionnaire was distributed to 30 staff and 100 students in each site. The selected staff are described as academic, research and administrative. The views of those staff who maintained, cleaned and provided catering and security services in these buildings were not canvassed. There was a 69% response rate from staff (103) and a 57% response rate from students (287). Interviews with staff and focus groups with students were carried out alongside observation of interactions within buildings. It was determined that:

> '…. the existence of well-designed buildings on a campus is a significant factor in the recruitment of staff and of students' (CABE, 2005 p.7)

Comments indicated that a pleasing environment contributed to overall satisfaction in the workplace. But any attempt to extrapolate this to a favourable impact on retention seems tenuous.

Evidence of links between the quality of the built environment and that of teaching and learning is also lacking (Neary & Thody, 2009). Research in schools has established a connection between the upkeep of buildings, a clean and tidy environment and a well functioning social organisation. This, in turn, is believed to have a beneficial impact on learning (Temple, 2008).

However, larger claims are made, a design guide to effective university learning space states:

> "A learning space should be able to motivate learners and promote learning as an activity…"

with the capacity to

> "…. energise and inspire learners and tutors"
> (hefce, 2006 p.3).

No explanation is given of how such a strong emotional effect could be achieved. The focus of the report is actually on maximising occupancy because of increased population density.

> "Large, underutilised spaces already exist in most colleges and universities. If catering facilities, common rooms, even corridor space are reconsidered as social meeting and group learning environments institutions could both save on large-space provision and make a statement about their vision for learning as a pervasive and inclusive activity based on social interaction" (hefce, 2006 p. 28)

To this end, informal collaborative learning with peers is to be encouraged, wireless technology is to allow social areas to be used as learning spaces outside timetabled activities. All spaces are to be appropriated, all to be multifunctional, welcoming and secure. How this flexibility is to be created, the equipment be secured and these areas to be staffed is not mentioned.

A further requirement on university estates is to generate income. Barnett and Temple (2006) consider it unlikely that estates will be reduced in the next ten years and that they will be increasingly seen as a marketing asset. Making maximum use of buildings and facilities attracts different customers for regular or one-off activities. One function is to provide a

physical point of contact and interaction to facilitate collaboration with business (Lambert Review, 2003). Another is to rent facilities to outside groups and individuals. An hefce (2011) report on higher education estates performance over a ten year period from 1999-2000 to 2008-2009 presents a profitable picture. The average income from non-residential estate has risen each year by more than 56% from £637 to £1,136 per square metre at a time in which the retail prices index rose by 30%. The charge for residential accommodation rose from £1,970 to £3,395 a year, per bed space. During this time the cost of provision has risen by 65%, income by 72%. These factors, greater density of occupancy, appropriation of space and maximising income emphasises the use of the whole estate. It seems likely this would increase the workload and role of the people who staff areas other than teaching rooms and offices.

These structural changes in the university workplace have raised areas of tension at sector, institutional and interpersonal levels. The increased numbers of students and staff gathering on an increased estate has to be funded, increasing competition between universities for available finance. Who pays, what they pay for and what they expect in return has raised concerns over a shift in power away from academics to politicians, business customers, managers and students.

2.2 **Structural Tensions**

Although there is recognition that universities are engaged with different stakeholders, the concern is mainly with those who provide funds in some form. Employees are important internal stakeholders, they can be seen as a group working to a common end, although with different degrees of influence on this purpose and its implementation. Organisations dominated by professional groups can establish a top down view in which groups seen as support or ancillary staff contribute to the work of the professionals rather than have important functions in their own right. The wider debate therefore has been more about how outside stakeholders relate to an internal group of staff which is treated more or less as a whole in relation to academic work.

Watson (2009) discusss the difficulty of establishing the ownership of universities and the problematic concept of stakeholders, generally used to denote determining interests. The picture that emerges in the literature is that there are different interest groups including staff and students, with differing amounts of control constraining universities in various, often conflicting ways.

> "They have a variety of different stakeholders …. all of whom must be persuaded to buy into the overall strategy. They have very limited freedom to set their prices, or to manage their costs, and they have to be ready to adapt their plans to meet changing public policies."
> (Lambert Review, 2003 p.14).

Sector funding is published in five categories. Table 2.9 shows the breakdown of funding for the years of the study.

Table 2.9 – Higher Education Sources of Income

	2008-09	2009-2010
Funding body grants	8,819,359	9,043,115
Tuition fees and education contracts	7,282,639	8,272,137
Research grants and contracts	4,144,582	4,345,421
Other income	4,769,744	4,915,913
Endowment and investment income	356,942	219,201
Total Income*	25,373,267	26,795,787

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

There is a fundamental tension between the desire for greater student numbers and the associated cost of student places. This is apparent in a statement by a previous Secretary of State. He reiterates the 'Robbins' declaration:

> "This Government believes that everyone with the talent and ambition to enter higher education should be able to benefit from the opportunity." (Denham, 2008)

The rest of the statement and covering letter are about restricting the number of places and financial support to students, at best, well below the costs of attending university.

It is difficult to determine how much public money is absorbed by universities. The five categories of institutional income are not helpful in this. Funding Council Grants are public money. Tuition Fees may come from public grants or individuals. Research income includes public funds from Research Councils, Government bodies and public sector organisations as well as private industry, commerce and charities. Payments by charities contain public subsidy in their tax privileges. Other income refers to commercial activity which may include projects and posts paid for from public funds. Income deriving from residential bed spaces, catering and conferences deploys an infrastructure developed by public finance. Intellectual property rights and consultancy arise from the work of salaried staff. An example of concealed public subsidy is the expansion in academic books, conferences and journals. These are linked to research resources being allocated on the basis of previous outputs. It is suggested the vested interests of funders, academics and publishers contribute to a vast and counterproductive literature (Graham, 2002). Academics are salaried, the price of their products does not have to cover their labour (Melody, 1997). Further output of academic papers and presentations is accommodated in conferences. If these are held in commercial venues there is a direct transfer of public funds, if held at universities the income is

categorised as commercial although arising from public sources. Loans to students for fees can be quantified at the point of loan but how much is repaid and with what interest can only be known over time.

Overall, higher education institutions' levels of income are calculated at broadly 60% public and 40% private. The teaching function is most dependent on public funds, with over 80% of specified funds being public, with 'teaching intensive' universities being most dependent on it (JNCHES, 2008). A position that is further blurred by the proposed transfer of teaching costs to individual students (BIS, 2011). The amount of block funding from the Government reflects political priorities. After a period of post-war expansion, spending on universities lessened in the 1970s. There were serious reductions in the 1980's as part of the Government's agenda to reduce state spending. During the period 1990 to 2005, institutions suffered a further reduction in resources (JNCHES, 2008; Graham 2002; Stevens 2005). The 'Browne' Inquiry (2010), calculated that between 1989 and 1997 universities experienced a drop in funding per student of 36%

Universities have attempted to make an economic case for their receipt of public funds. There are difficulties in measuring tangible benefits, an attempt for Universities UK considered those most easily quantifiable to be export earnings, domestic employment and modelled estimates of 'knock on' effects on the economy (Universities UK, 2006). Attempts to measure claims made for more nebulous benefits such as social and democratic engagement (hefce, 2008) are avoided. No calculations for UK student off-campus spend were made on the assumption they would spend this money within the UK anyway. This does not consider the potential increased spend from full-time employment during their student years and from reduced disposable income through student debt thereafter. In 2010-11, 3.2 million people owed the Government around £35 billion in student loans and this did not include private loans, overdrafts and credit cards.

This balance between public and private funds impacts on the debate concerning the institutional status of universities. The current White Paper states universities

> "…. are not part of the public sector and their staff are not public sector employees" (BIS, 2011 p.14)

However, politicians decided what public money would be awarded on what criteria. They have set limits to the number of student places and determined the direction of delivery and curriculum by the imposition of performance requirements. Meeting these targets takes managerial time and skill. It is suggested a result has been professional managers gaining power and that scholarly values have been pitted against target driven decisions (Gibbs, 2008).

A further source of income is commercial business, through collaboration, consultancy, course provision and estate rental. Commercial fees for specific work, though valuable, do not solve the need for general funding but employee training is an area of continuous custom. However, servicing the requirements of business would require organisational change. The 'Dearing' Inquiry solicited the views of employers by questionnaires sent to 173 large companies by post and 88 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) after seminars. 119 returns were analysed of which 60% were from large businesses and 40% from smaller. Responses highlighted the capacity of business to recruit international graduates. UK graduates and courses were considered out of date, with private training provision being of higher quality. Universities were thought to be useful in training public sector employees and meeting the requirements of professional bodies. For staff development, short specific courses at weekends and in the evenings, that were suitable for all ages, were required. A more current Inquiry reported 48% of employers not satisfied with the capacity of graduates (Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education, 'Browne', 2010)

Exclusive courses for business customers and provision for professional development have been provided. If employers are to pay for courses for their employees they may require modes of provision and timing to be designed for their convenience and purpose (hefce, 2008). Employed students want access to courses, staff and resources outside the academic year ('Milburn', 2009). This is a return to the mode of provision of technical advanced education, when it was expected students would be employed, requiring flexible ways of studying. Young and mature students would study together in evening classes, part-time, day release and sandwich courses. Access to resources for self-study and meeting places were important. A tradition of community and industry engagement was linked with a high percentage of home and part-time students (Pratt, 1997). Business sponsored students are attractive, not needing grants and loans they are exempt from future controls on student places (BIS, 2011; Bridges, 2000).

However, the majority of students are self-supporting and remain the largest potential pool of money.

> "The remaining possible source of income is students and their families. There is near universal expectation amongst our respondents that first degree students will be making a significant contribution towards the cost of their higher education by 2004."
> (Centre for Higher Education Studies, 1994).

English students' direct financial contribution to their university education has been increasing for 20 years. In 1990 the maintenance grant was frozen and supplemented by government backed loans. In 1998 universal maintenance grants were abolished, with commercial loans provided. An up-front tuition fee of £1,000 was introduced in the same year, rising to a post-graduation fee of just over £3,000 in 2004 (payable for new students from 2006). This was promoted as a differential 'top-up' fee but universities chose to charge the maximum rate. In their submission to the 'Browne Inquiry' the Russell Group (2010) considered sources of funding. The Government had signaled a withdrawal from increased spending. Business was reluctant to contribute sufficiently to employee training, the market

for international students had become too competitive to enable fee rises. The only source left was UK students. The Group proposed unlimited fees to establish a market spread which 'Browne' endorsed ('Browne', 2010). Political judgment imposed a cap, with an announcement of an increase of tuition fee to between £6,000 and £9,000 for 2012 (BIS, 2011). Most universities have announced fees at the top end of the range for most courses.

Students must therefore be attracted and satisfied:

> "They will decide where the funding should go; and institutions will compete to get it. As students will be paying more than in the current system, they will demand more in return."
> ('Browne', 2010 p.29).

2.2.1 Working Practice

It is suggested funders' requirements may be causing managers to determine the range of course provision by financial rather than intellectual criteria, affecting academics control of the curriculum (King, 1995). This process may be compounded by the requirement to attract and account for public money in specific ways, draining money from academic subjects to fund managerial and administrative posts (Pears, 2010). The content and mode of curriculum provision is also changing in controversial ways. Tensions over modularisation and such concepts as transferable skills and employability, have reignited debates over the values ascribed to humanities, science, social science and technological subjects (BIS, 2011; 'Browne', 2010; The British Academy, 2004; Maskell & Robinson 2002). Flexibility of provision has resulted in modules that can be selected and grouped by students, arguably weakening the dominance of academic disciplines and academics (Graham 2002; Bridges, 2000; King, 1995). The need to engage and satisfy students may have led to making course work easier with a greater emphasis on entertainment. Academic judgment over assessments of student work may be diluted to meet performance targets for students

attainment (Maskell & Robinson, 2002). A heading in the current White Paper, "well-informed students driving teaching excellence" (BIS, 2011 p.25) encapsulates this, an interesting reversal of what could be expected, well-informed teachers driving student excellence. The remaining remit of academics, the disinterested pursuit of knowledge may have been undermined over years by the link between research outputs and funding (Nixon 1996).

2.2.2 Infrastructure

Aspects of these changes have impacted on peoples' requirements of the built environment. A more customer orientated approach is said to have contributed to an expectation of resources being available at all times. At the same time staff:student ratios have worsened, funding per student and space per student has decreased. Electronic means of course delivery and increased collaborative group work have changed requirements for access to computers. Wireless technology enables people to work in public areas previously considered social or recreational (Neary & Thody, 2009; Barnett & Temple, 2006).

Average non-residential space per full-time equivalent student fell by 42% between 1992 to 2001, from 14.7 to 8.5 square meters, increasing occupational density (hefce, 2011). Maximising estate occupancy may have created tensions over contested space. A managerial agenda of seeking efficient use of expensive space contrasts with optimal working conditions. The most flexible use of space is open-plan and multiple occupancy, whilst privacy and capacity to concentrate is valued by staff and some students. Part-time and visiting lecturers need office space in which they can meet students, in opposition to the requirement for maximum occupancy. Modular course provision requires flexible use of the entire estate yet buildings are historically organised in academic disciplines and administrative functions. Increasing use of peer group work may save staff time yet requires places for people to meet and talk, in opposition to people seeking quiet space to work.

This is particularly contentious in trying to divide library space. Computers allow different forms of contact and course provision yet take more space than other seating and present security problems (hefce, 2002). Larger numbers of non-residential students need secure places to socialise, work and eat within general areas.

Barnett & Temple (2006) describe the teaching day being extended, starting earlier and finishing later, neither being popular. Teaching activity throughout the year attracts funding but restricts opportunities for the research activities of academic staff. These extended periods of activity are allied to 24-hour access to resources such as libraries and informal social areas all of which have implications for the staff who provide access, security, caretaking and catering services.

There is potential for tension in the distribution of office space.

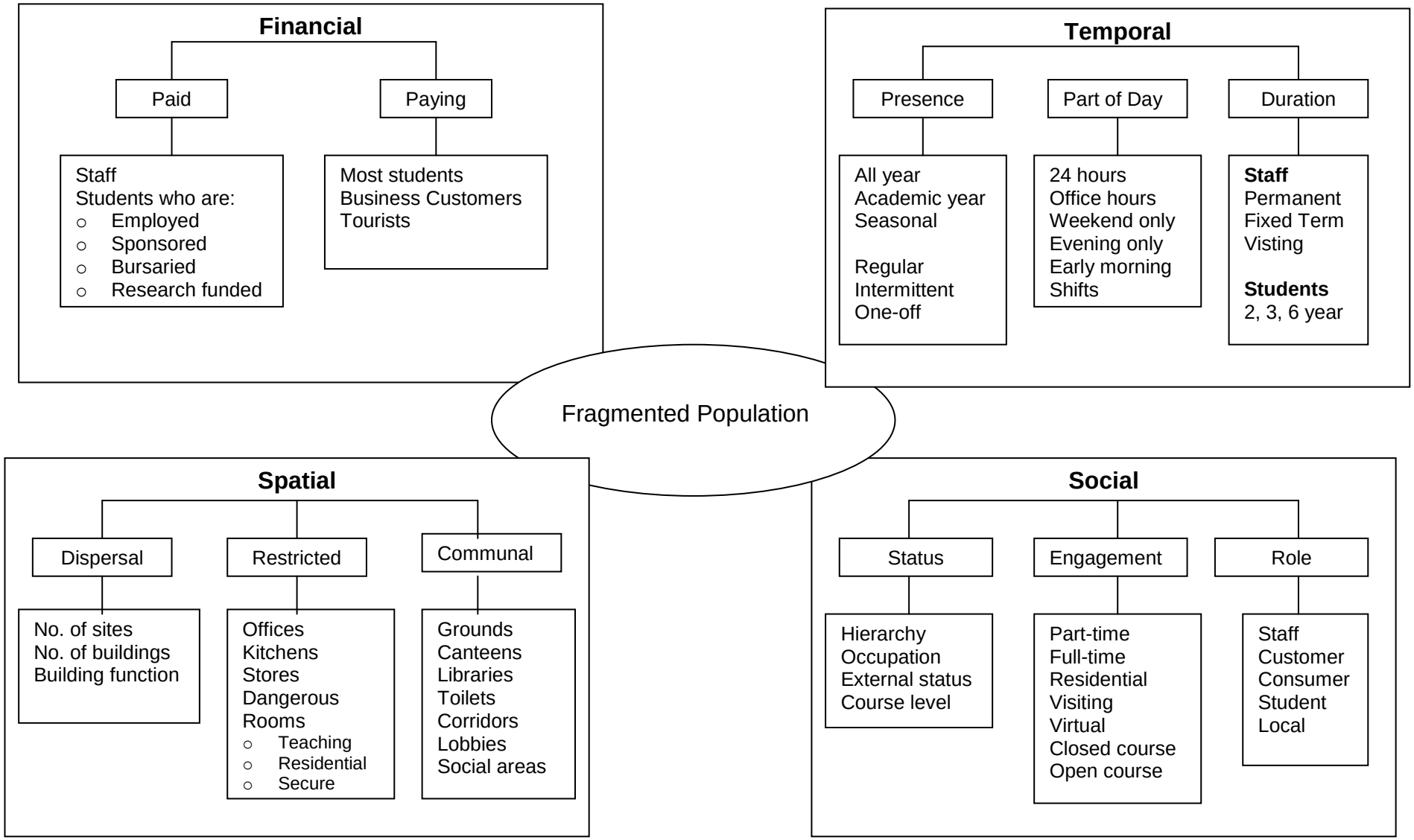
> "The move away from cellular space will be familiar to office workers but is challenging in the academic environment, where quiet, concentrated study and group working have often had dedicated settings." (Stantec, 2009)

Savings sought from moving disparate groups of administrative staff into large open-plan areas appear to have been resisted by academics. The average office space per person has been reduced by 1 square metre for administrators but increased by nearly a square metre for academic staff. Both groups still occupy officers larger than the norm in other sectors. These figures may not give a real picture because they relate to full time equivalent staffing figures rather than occupancy density that might result from periods of high activity.

This is a depiction of a busy place with a high density population, competition for resources and resulting tensions. Growth in the population, activities and estate of universities may have resulted in contested organisational power. It is argued the need for increased funding has strengthened political direction, the managerial role and the status of students. A decrease in staff:student ratio, allied to additional service provision, have intensified working practices. Insecure and part-time employment has increased. Labour intensive modes of

course delivery and administration have been partially replaced by technologically intensive modes, reducing social interactions. A large, fragmented and dispersed university population has been created. Figure 2.5 illustrates these divisions. People are divided by the degree of engagement, financial, physical and social relationship with and within their university. A consideration of the relations between these groups is the focus of the following Chapter.

Figure 2.5 – Structural Divisions within University Populations



Chapter 3 – University Work Relations

Chapter 2 set out the context of recent developments in English universities which have created the structural conditions of the employment of university staff. It also drew attention to the differentiation of staff within universities and how this is often ignored in discussion and even in the basic data. This next chapter looks more specifically at the issue of work relations in order to establish the context for the detailed examination of the occupation groups who are the subject of this thesis.

Although university workforces are stratified by occupation and hierarchy, in almost all the existing literature and official investigations it is the academic role against which others are defined. Academic staff have attracted most research attention from other academics and their concerns figure prominently in the literature. Research on other occupations groups in universities is sparse, that on the lower paid occupations is rare. Their relative invisibility and the silence over what may be their concerns are even reflected in the terms used to categorise them. Welcoming discussion of administrative functions in universities, Wright (2001) objected to the term 'non-academic'. Dobson (2000) notes that the term 'non-academic' defines people by the role they don't have and the work they don't do. These 'other' groups are large in number and of interest in their own right, they also help form the complexity of university social relationships. Changes in sector size, funding and working practice have affected not just academic staff and students but the interactions between all the elements of university populations.

3.1 Administrative and Managerial Perspectives

Collinson (2007) examined the work experience of Research Administrators drawn from the members of an occupational national network. From 77 respondents to an e.mail questionnaire 27 staff from 19 higher education institutions were interviewed. Respondents reported frustration and a sense of denigration and lack of respect from academics. Whilst

resenting this, participants wished to ally themselves with this dominant group. They used physical signs such as displayed books and degree certificates to indicate academic status. In turn they denigrated other workers and work activities perceived as inferior.

Literature on administrative staff is sparse in the UK. In Australia Szekeres (2006) investigated the views of staff working in administrative departments or engaged in student and academic support roles. She identified myths held by one occupation group about others and a false assumption that all staff have a common goal. She noted that the importance of individuals within an organisation may not relate to job grade, highlighting the role of long serving people who know how to get things done. The dominant view was reported that workplace status diminished the further an individual's work is from that which is perceived as academic.

The one group of staff who could be expected to establish another set of high status relations within universities are the managerial and professional staff. They are often highly qualified in academic terms as well as within other professional qualifications, therefore having an alternative status hierarchy and a developing role (Whitchurch, 2008). But this role can be contested by academics. There are perceptions of inherent tensions in placing professional managerial approaches against collegiate ones (Watson, 2009; Deem, 2008). These polarised positions can conceal the dual roles of many staff (Whitchurch, 2006; Maskell & Robinson, 2002). There could also be differences reflecting the structural tensions within the sector. Clegg & McAuley (2005) found innovation and energy amongst managers and considered that newer universities, with a history of a corporate management culture, may be more at ease with the developments. A focus on the academic perspective may ignore the way in which these changes have created jobs for people in other occupations who are likely to have a different view. It also places the discussion as contested organisational roles at the top of a hierarchy, between two organisationally privileged groups. This does not give attention to the work relations of this developing occupation group and the rest of the university workforce.

The work relations across the groups within these occupational hierarchies can be glimpsed in studies addressing specific areas of distress and satisfaction. Changes in working practice have engendered interest in occupational stress in university staff. Tytherleigh, Webb, Cooper & Ricketts (2005) are unusual in investigated the views of all occupation groups. These were conflated into four categories: Academic and Research; Academic-support; Administrative and & Clerical; Facility-support. 10,090 anonymous questionnaires were sent out to the home addresses of staff in 14 UK Higher Education Institutions with a 38% useable response. Returns from 13 universities were reported on. Response rates differed between the occupation groups.

- Academic and Research – 1329 sent, 35% response
- Administrative and Clerical - 1114 sent, 30% response
- Academic Support - 940 sent, 25% response
- Facilities - 380 sent, 10% response

The extent to which the response rates reflect the university hierarchy is immediately evident. So also is the big gap between the response rates of different 'non-academic groups' and the very low response rate of facilities staff, the group within which the catering, caretaking and security staff of a university would be placed.

Differences are also apparent once responses were analysed. Academic staff reported the greatest stress, administrative staff the least. Stressors identified were job insecurity; work relationships; exclusion from decision making; restricted resources and poor managerial communication. For facility staff stress was associated with work relationships, lack of control and the overall job. Most respondents worked between 31 and 40 hours per week although 40% of Academic and Research staff reported 51-61 hours work a week. Using home addresses could ensure contact with varied employees, however, of the respondents 83% were on permanent, full-time contracts. Data protection meant questionnaires had to be sent out by individual institutions. Although stamped addressed envelopes to the researchers were provided this involvement of employers could be seen as signalling their

engagement. The study was conducted during the time of negotiations leading to a remedial pay settlement. This raises at least the possibility of over reporting, with inflated reports or participation more likely with people wishing to signal distress. These problems are not unusual, they illustrate the difficulty of reliance on questionnaires which presume areas of relevance and adequate response rates (Blaug, Kenyon & Lekhi, 2007).

3.2 **Academic Staff Perspectives**

The literature on work in universities tends to reflect a common approach which stresses the pressures that academics are under. As the dominant view this could be projected on to university staff generally. Much of this literature seems built around a sense of loss. This raises two interrelated questions. The first is whether this is how academic staff actually experience their work or rather how they represent it? Such a question cannot be resolved here, the concern is only to outline some of these representations before posing the second question. Whether it makes sense to project these concerns on to the staff groups who are the subject of this thesis?

There have been attempts to determine the elements of their work that academic staff find satisfying, unsatisfying and stressful. These expose tensions in social interactions. Contact with colleagues and students was valued, but other pressures enforced isolated working practices. Nixon (1996) interviewed 30 lecturers from two universities. The interviews were supplemented by discussion, comments in seminars and follow-up interviews in each university. There was concern over the fragmentation of the academic profession through the use of permanent and fixed-term contracts. Research and course development had become the remit of permanent staff with teaching and day-to-day student contact the remit of insecure staff. This increased differences in status and autonomy. Relationships with colleagues had been damaged with internal competition, increasing isolation and decreasing the cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Abouserie (1996) sought to identify sources of stress and stress levels in academic staff in one university. Questionnaires were sent to all academic staff in all departments via internal mail. 69% were returned (414). The work stressors identified were research 40%; time 40%; relationship with others 27%; teaching 19%; administration and bureaucracy 19%; students 15%. Stress levels were described as moderate by 74% with lecturers the most stressed group and the higher the level of stress, the lower the level of job satisfaction. Staff deployed coping strategies indicating a tension between social interactions being valued coupled with a desire to avoid them. Talking with others was cited as helpful but withdrawing was also used, by not going to work and shutting themselves up in their offices. The study therefore revealed an agenda for academics that would seem to have little relevance to other groups in universities as well as a set of coping strategies that other staff might not be in a position to deploy.

An attempt to elicit views on change in the sector was made by Kinman and Jones (2003). They sent questionnaires to a random sample of 2000 academics employed in UK universities. Of the 782 respondents 70% said their jobs were stressful, 75% that their jobs had become more stressful over the last 5 years, with 76% expected them to be more stressful in the future. 25% had taken time off during the preceding year for illness attributed to work stress. The most commonly reported stressors were conflict between pace of work and quality; time spent on paperwork; frequent interruptions; a lack of opportunity for scholarly work, not enough time for students, who they no longer got to know; the job interfering with personal life. They reported a belief that management had become less interested in their views, decreasing their sense of participation. 52% reported diminished job satisfaction. However, 71% considered their jobs to be rewarding and worthwhile with 74% considering it to be intellectually stimulating. There was a perception that the service to students had declined with 52% stating they did no have enough time to deal with students' problems meaning that they no longer got to know them.

Rhodes, Hollinshead & Nevill (2007) explored the job satisfaction of academics in two universities, one perceived as research-intensive and one as teaching intensive. The research began from an assumption that changes in higher education have demoralised academic staff. Participants ranked questionnaire items as most satisfying and most dissatisfying, with a response rate of 54%. The areas chosen as most satisfying were "friendliness of colleagues"; "collaborative working"; "intellectual challenge"; "opportunities for self-management"; "a belief in one's own ability to be effective". The most dissatisfying items were the amount of time spent on administration and workload.

These studies present a reported experience dominated by reactions to unwelcome changes to workloads and priorities, with declining morale. However, there seems a view that work is generally satisfying. This demonstrates the paradox described by (Watson, 2009), where individuals asked about their work in face-to-face conversation were engaged with pleasurable activities. But in survey responses and commentary, report distress. This raises questions about the climate in which research is carried out and the assumptions prompting the survey questions.

A depiction of academic staff as overwhelmed by workplace intensification may pose other problems. Trowler (1997) carried out an ethnographic study over five years in one university, including 50 interviews with academics. He did find overwork, distress and lack of time and energy for research. Staff reported frustration at not being able to do their work as well as they wanted and work adversely affecting their home lives. The organisation of course provision in modules meant there was inadequate time for personal relationships to develop. Some coping strategies were inadequate, trying to do everything leaving staff tired, distressed and ill. However, he rejected the implication of powerlessness in much of the commentary. There were tactics of structural and individual resistance. Collectively staff were finding and exploiting ambiguity in policy statements, reducing curriculum options, making courses unnecessarily difficult or concealing them to reduce take-up. Individual staff deployed tactics of avoidance, subversion and work to rule. They withdrew from students, avoiding them or not being welcoming when contact was unavoidable. Meetings and

projects were avoided, even when desired. Teaching methods such as developing student independent study or using monologue to avoid interaction were deployed. The physical autonomy of teaching was used to subvert the official syllabus. Work-to-rule was raised in apportioning time to marking students' work and using old resources. Not all staff found the changes onerous. Some had previously been hampered by structural discrimination, others got chances to develop declining areas. Those staff entering the university from market orientated, customer responsive workplaces were culturally attuned.

There are clearly therefore a complex set of issues involved in analysing work relations in a university even if the agenda is restricted to the concerns of academic staff. Given the complexity of the workforce in any university the academic view is limited. This is also the case in considering the ways in which work relations are affected by staff interactions with students.

3.3 **Staff Interactions with Students**

One consequence of the dominance of the academic perspective in the literature is that it limits the discussion on staff and student interactions. It positions these as being between teachers and students. In this context a loss of intimacy and mutual respect can be seen as the major problem. However, this does not explore much of the totality of the social interactions which actually exist. The previous chapter outlined structural shifts in English universities. These have created a situation in which university staff are arguably more exposed to situations of conflict. But it does not follow that the different groups will see and experience these conflicts in the same way.

A college based, residential, university population meeting together in a defined academic year offers a chance for people to come to know each other (Bridges 2000). A larger, population accessing disparate sites throughout the whole year means students find themselves in an impersonal, complex, unfamiliar environment (Trowler, 1997). Their capacity to manage is of importance to Universities as course completion is linked to income.

A range of different personal and study support services have developed alongside those traditionally responding to 18 year old school leavers in residential universities (Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006). This specialist support contrasts with diminishing contact with academic and administrative staff. The loss of face-to-face contact and social intimacy is a theme running throughout the literature. A combination of a decrease in the staff:student ratio and a rise in administrative workload detracts from the time and energy academic staff have for students. The two populations of staff and student have not grown at the same rate. Between 1973 and 1983 the staff:student ratio changed from 1:5 to 1:11 by a process of natural wastage, early retirement and redundancy through institutional merger. Since then there has been a further reduction (Hussey & Smith, 2010). There is some complexity because role definition may also have changed, work once done by an academic may now be done by a non academic and vice versa. But it seems there has been a decline in the reported intimacy between students and their teachers (Tight, 2009; Brown & Scase, 1997; Nixon, 1996) and reduction in the individual attention given to them (UCU, 2006)

The rhetoric around the changes in university education speak of the centrality of the student experience. The current White Paper is called "Students at the Heart of the System" (BIS, 2011). This contrast with reports on the quality of what they are offered.

> "…. raised student-staff ratios, larger student group sizes, reduced individual staff-student contact time, less time available for developmental activities outside the directly assessed curriculum, and reduced access by students to some high-cost facilities". (JNCHES, 2008 p. 42)

This raises questions of whether other types of relations may exist or have become more important and, if so, whether they are given adequate recognition?

A further complication arises from the extent to which social interactions might be affected by the more commercialised relations that have developed within universities. Academic research and commentary concerning universities contains an inherent assumption that

university education is of considerable value. Concerns are over the capacity of entrants to benefit from it and of wide access devaluing it. The presumption that to be competitive a workforce must undertake higher education has opened a new market of 'lifelong learning' entrants for universities (Bill, 1998). Vocationally orientated study has allowed the development of new products such as the two year foundation degree (DfES, 2003). Emphasis is placed on accommodating those aspiring to attend rather than the necessity to mine new sources of students in order to preserve jobs in the enlarged sector.

> "The simple financial need for contemporary universities to attract, please and keep students is incontestable." (Graham, 2002 p.47)

The presence of sufficient students, willing to co-operate is essential to attract funding. It is open to question whether the need to recruit them has become inherently exploitative. An explicit link is made between a degree, life opportunities and wealth.

> ".... graduates are more likely to be employed, more likely to enjoy higher wages and better job satisfaction, and more likely to find it easier to move from one job to the next." ('Browne', 2010 p.14)

Sirvanci (1996) positions business as the customer of universities, with the graduate as the product, the graduate premium being the price the customer is prepared to pay for this product. 'Browne' (2010) considers the premium paid to graduate staff to be sufficient contribution by employers to higher education. This positions students as working at university for a deferred benefit for which they have to pay a current price. Staff have no control over the value of the deferred benefit but could be seen as the benefactors of the financial cost to the individual student. This poses an obvious problem for staff relations with students. As they pay more, might students come to have expectations as customers? This issue is again primarily posed in terms of the relations between academic staff and students,

with concern over potential pressures on academics to respond to student consumer demands, but the issue goes beyond that. A change in students' perceptions of their position might also affect relations with other groups. This may be exacerbated if students question the basis of the transaction, the value of the deferred financial benefit has been in question for many years.

> "With the growth in student numbers has come a devaluation in the currency of a degree, with graduates no longer feeling confident of achieving high salaries and high status in later life."
> (Smith & Webster 1997 p.2)

Calculations of the graduate premium range from £400,000 to £34,000 over a working life. The difference is accounted for by benchmark, university and course. The highest figures derive from contrasting graduate pay to the whole non-graduate population. The lower figures take people with two 'A' Levels as a more realistic benchmark. The 'Browne' report gives a figure of £100,000 net of taxation ('Browne', 2010) Government Departments have calculated it at a 50% premium (DfES, 2003) and then at £120,000 and £100,000 (BIS, 2009) Universities UK suggest £160,000 with wide variations depending on course, with arts graduates achieving only £34,000. The premium is not evenly distributed across the sector with an additional average premium of 6-10% for graduating from an elite university (Russell Group, 2010). The Labour Force Survey offers a 38% premium with a median hourly pay gap of £6 between people with 'A' levels and a degree in 2010 (ons, 2011). These figures do not take into account the costs of university, nor include the loss of income that would have been earned over the years of attendance. At current fees it seems that for many graduates there will be a net loss. This situation will worsen for most students with proposed fees of up to £9,000 a year plus associated interest from 2012. The picture is further complicated by the increase in sub-degree higher education. The Labour Force Survey calculation for the median hourly pay gap between people with a degree and other higher education qualifications is £3.50 (12% (ons, 2011), raising questions about the return on the extra costs of a degree.

High quality work and status are also in question. The percentage of graduates in the working population has steadily increased as university attendance and the age range of students has become wider. In the 1960s only 6% of young people went to university, by the mid-1990s 30% of school leavers did and the target of 50% of people between 18 and 35 is within sight ('Browne', 2010; Milburn, 2009). The proportion of people of working age, 22-64 with a degree has changed from 12% in 1993 to 25% in 2010 (ons, 2011) and will continue to grow. This necessarily affects the market rate of a degree.

> "…. the more people who have it, the less valuable it becomes as a means of entering top positions, but the greater is the penalty for those who fail to get access to it at all." ('Milburn' 2009 p.32)

A glut of graduates in the market may simply shift non-graduates out of jobs for which a degree is not necessary, an argument that this may be beneficial as a graduate post-holder may lead to job enhancement (hefce, 1995) seems self-serving. Of employed people aged 22 to 64 in 2010, only 56.6% of those with a degree were employed in jobs considered to require that level of qualification. 26.7% had jobs requiring sub-degree level higher education with 16.8% working in other jobs (ons, 2011)

Choosing occupation specific courses may not be effective as a route to employment, there is no mechanism to limit graduate supply to occupation demand. Rather than enjoying a financial benefit from going to university, people may enter into decades of debt in order to participate in a job market in which degrees are an initial sort tool in recruitment procedures. There are questions as to whether many students are getting something of real value (Maskell & Robinson, 2002) or are being exploited by the self-perpetuating interests of a powerful monopoly. A diminution of the market power of a degree may mean a postgraduate

award is now necessary for many occupations (‘Milburn’, 2009). Students may have to incur more debt to obtain the graduate premium,

> “…. individuals with a postgraduate qualification enjoy higher earnings that those with only a first degree”
> (BIS, 2011, p.64).

What is initially marketed as valuable becomes ‘only’ in promoting another product.

In 1963 the ‘Robbins’ report could assume that

> “In higher education, as distinct from school education, both partners to the enterprise of learning are adult and both are where they are by choice” (Higher Education – Report, 1963 p.170).

At that time there were a variety of institutions of higher education offering different modes and durations of study leading to different awards and occupations. Universities now have a monopoly on entry routes to a wide range of occupations, people have to follow this route whether they wish to attend university or not (‘Milburn’, 2009). At a time of perceived diminution of academic service (JNCHES, 2008).

There are dangers in positioning university education as a step to something of value rather than being of value in itself. It seems likely that some students may be hostile or unwilling to perform their expected role and that as more people from different backgrounds attend, aspects of university culture may be challenged. If students make a choice based on price and expected return they have an inherent requirement to get the highest value. Increases in tuition fees from 2012 (BIS, 2011) shift tuition costs from social funding to the individual. This also shifts the financial risks to the individual of uncompleted courses or low level awards. Concerns already exist that litigation will rise as students sue universities seeking redress in the event of poor grades (Richards & Halpin, 2006). Financial settlements,

damages and legal costs can result from students seeking redress for perceived failure in course quality, personal safety or a discrepancy between marketing claims and reality (Palfreyman, 2003; Hussey & Smith, 2010).

As well as legal redress students may take their complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education, if they have not been settled through university procedures. These cases range from judicial reviews to surprisingly trivial customer service problems. To reach adjudication, complaints will have absorbed staff time as they were pursued through institutional procedures but do not accrue other significant financial costs. This could change if a whole cohort of students pursued the same complaint or if the numbers of individual complaints escalate.

> "…. the logic of encouraging students to behave as consumers is that there will be significantly increased numbers of complaints as fees double or triple". (OIA e-newsletter, November 2010)

Part of the sense of loss reported for academic staff is that of a reciprocal sense of trust and integrity. They are now exposed to constant surveillance through student feedback in surveys and websites. There are proposals to publish module student feedback, enabling scrutiny of satisfaction levels for individual teachers (BIS, 2011). The need to defend themselves is likely to increase the administrative workload of staff. University staff have to manage the student workforce, to obtain most outputs for restricted resources, dealing with resistance by applying encouragement and sanctions. For alienated students with external commitments, appropriating other peoples' work may be rational behaviour. A 'google' search for "buy university assignments" brought up many sites offering a variety of academic course work at all levels. Circumventing plagiarism detecting software was a selling point. The reported rise in plagiarism challenges academic values and causes concern to academics attempting to prevent it, placing staff and students in conflict (Perry, 2008).

Managing the work of students is therefore complicated by their complex role in the hierarchy but this does not affect all staff in the same way nor does it mean that students are customers like any other. Direct payments from students create a disputed role as customers and service consumers of an education product (Brookes, 2003). There is a straightforward customer role when buying products and services from university commercial outlets but positioning students as customers shopping for a degree is problematic. Customers usually can choose to buy what they want from sellers, with supply and demand establishing a price. Universities will not sell to everybody, the sector is oversubscribed and entry competitive. People cannot choose where to go, only where to apply. Supply is controlled by politicians determining the number of universities, places, maximum price and student subsidy (BIS, 2011). The brand of different universities has different values yet the price is the same. A customer does not normally allow the seller to assess the success of the transaction yet university staff assess progress and award degrees (Sirvanci, 1996). Linking course fees directly to tuition rather than a contribution to the overall costs of universities may position lecturers as the employees of students, segregating the academic workforce further.

Within these structural constraints other forms of challenging behaviour could emerge. Violence, abuse and bullying by staff and students was reported in an on-line survey open to all higher education staff which received over 1,200 responses (Boynton, 2005). A Freedom of Information request revealed that approximately 1,000 incidents of aggressive behaviour towards staff were recorded between 2000 and 2005 in UK universities (Baty, 2005). Many universities recorded no such events raising the question of uneven distribution or underreporting. Numerous incidents of violence, aggressive behaviour, verbal abuse, sexual and racial harassment were reported in a UNISON (2005) survey of their members working in UK higher education. Lee (2006) interviewed 22 academics who responded to an invitation to discuss unacceptable student conduct. These staff referred to instances of physical attack; inappropriate sexual behaviour; destructive manipulative behaviour; frequent verbal abuse and one example of stalking. Problems in reporting such incidents were raised with both supportive and harmful responses from colleagues and mangers described. This

study is open to criticism for drawing too wide conclusions from the experience of a small number of participants. However, it was a useful contribution in moving beyond events to the structural difficulties in addressing them.

Positioning students as service consumers is also problematic, they are not passive recipients of a service, their work is essential to the success of the university (Conway, Mackay & Yorke, 1994). Students are part of interactions with service providers and may lack insight into their part of whether these are satisfying. In assessing education as a service students may not have sufficient experience to evaluate what is being offered (Hill, 1995; Hussey & Smith, 2010). Yet they are expected to do so.

> "Students are best placed to make the judgment about what they want to get from participating in higher education."
> ('Browne', 2010 p.25).

Whether this is an accurate assessment or not it does raise the question of whether the job of staff is to satisfy pre-existing requirements or to use their expertise to induct students into further possibilities (Graham, 2002). It also raises the ethical position of university marketing. The balance between giving the best impression of provision without making false claims (Gibbs, 2008; Hill, 1995). The move from assessing and admitting students to enticing them is explicit in the 'Browne' report

> "There will be more investment available for the HEIs that are able to convince students that it is worthwhile"
> ('Browne', 2010 p.8)

The decision of most universities to charge the maximum £9,000 fee from 2012 has raised accusations of price fixing and calls for universities to be subject to the monopolies commission and fair trading regulations (Attwood, 2010). If there is little price differentiation

in the market, students may make decisions on perceptions of quality (Centre for Higher Education Studies, 1994). There is no standardised curriculum, contact hours or teaching personnel (Higher Education Policy Institute, 2009). This presents a confused picture to prospective students. The quality of information provided through rankings, student satisfaction surveys and league tables is disputed. The reputation of a university represents marketable value to students leading to accusations of collusion between student and staff to improve institutional position (Harvey, 2008; Newman, 2008; Furedi, 2008). Regulated comparative information is proposed, co-ordinated by consumer organisations. Out of six suggested items for course information, four relate to post-graduation job outcomes ('Browne', 2010).

Lacking clear information, the brand of the university sector, the degree and the individual university could be important. The sector lacks internal regulatory mechanisms, examples of fraudulent practice can damage its reputation. Brown & Scase (1997) consider the brand of the degree is a marketable commodity because of its cultural validity. High participation rates have damaged the elite quality of the brand, encapsulated in Stevens' (2005) book title "University to Uni". Although a wide choice may be offered, for many the cost of maintenance, families and local jobs will mean students with fewer resources simply apply to their local university (Milburn, 2009). It is therefore possible that many students will attend universities in a frame of mind less amenable than that envisaged by Robbins.

It can be seen from the preceding Chapters that the work experience of university staff in England lies within the context of significant sector change (Stevens, 2005; Graham, 2002; Maskell & Robinson, 2002). Staff work in institutions all of which are termed Universities, yet they are derived from different traditions, academic and social status and student demographics. One factor they have in common is large numbers of people gathering on built estates and requiring services. This population is fragmented by money, status, attendance, and level of engagement. There are complex interactions between these people which can be pleasing but also tense and occasionally frightening. The largest group is

students whose work is essential to institutional survival and who have been positioned to challenge all decisions which disadvantage them.

The literature is helpful in identifying structural tensions where working practices are compromising the values associated with academic staff. It depicts increased pressure on academic staff through rising administrative workloads and role conflicts with rising levels of stress. The time available for activities providing satisfaction has decreased affecting relationships with colleagues and students. Job security and participation in decision making has decreased. Yet overall these jobs are reported to be satisfying. Academic staff are a minority within universities yet do the research and write the literature.

3.4 **Shifting the Perspective – Where are the Manual Staff?**

As discussed, the experience of other university occupation groups is barely addressed and there are dangers in projecting the concerns of one group on to that of others. The least documented are those staff employed in roles designated as manual. Searches have not revealed any studies reflecting directly on the interaction of students with catering, caretaking and security staff. Trade Union published surveys of members do canvas the views of manual staff, focusing on aspects of working conditions such as stress and violence at work (UNISON, 2005, 2008). Representatives of manual staff have been unsuccessful in gaining access to *Times Higher Education*, the dominant UK trade journal for higher education (UNISON, 2009). Mention of these staff occurs on the periphery in research studies focusing on other university populations. A comprehensive review of research concerning 1st year student experience identified the importance of induction and social integration to student retention. It focussed on academic and support service staff without discussion of the staff with whom students may have daily contact (Harvey et al, 2006). Clegg, Bradley, & Smith, (2006) considering student support, mention the interaction of a student with security staff. One study researching stress in University staff included facilities staff with 38 responses to questionnaires (Tytherleigh et al. 2005).

None of the inquiry reports on important developments in higher education policy mention these staff. Studies of building design and estate have considered occupational density, flexibility of access and the additional requirements on social space but not the people securing and staffing these areas. The impact of the built environment on the teaching and learning functions of universities is insufficiently researched, there are indications they are important at least for recruitment and satisfaction (CABE, 2005). Attention is accorded to income generating activities such as conferences and tourist accommodation, important in capitalising on resources. These require catering, room preparation and security for commercial and academic success. Site security such as CCTV cameras and card access to buildings is raised (JISC, 2006) with no mention of who is watching the cameras or checking the cards.

The particular pressures of work intensification affecting academic staff may not hold equal importance for all occupation groups. Although manual staff may share some of the concerns identified for other staff it would be wrong to presume that they perceive them in the same way or that they do not identify other concerns particular to their occupations. Low paid service work has been studied in other work environments. Themes have been identified as boredom, frustration, bullying, abuse and violence, poor facilities, lack of autonomy and control. However, assuming similarities with the reported experience of manual service workers in other sectors could fail to recognise that staff may view a university as a distinctive type of workplace. There may be implications for manual workers of doing physical work in institutions so devoted to valuing intellectual work. There may also be implications for their work in their relationships with the transitory population of students which is a key characteristic of Universities. These concerns may be hidden from studies that consider the work of staff from the perspective of managers (Michie, Wren & Williams, 2004) which may also miss informal, hidden aspects of staff's contribution (Star & Strauss, 1999).

Their absence from the research literature as writers or participants means the information available is too sparse to know whether questions asked of staff in other University occupation groups are relevant to manual staff. Little is known about their work experience or expectations, including whether changes in the sector have affected them and if so detrimentally or favourably. The perspective of those staff providing catering, caretaking and security services is overlooked. The job of these staff is to feed, care for and protect the three million people in the higher education population. Security staff have responsibility for guarding valuable property and estates and the people on them. They are present twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year (hefce, 2002). These staff may provide insight into aspects of the learning and social dimensions of a University from an under considered perspective. It is necessary to go to the staff to ask individuals in these different occupations what their experience of working in a university is. In order to avoid projecting the agenda of one group on to another or of presuming that we can deduce peoples' experience from theory, the key questions to ask seem to be more empirical. How do these staff experience their work; how have they experienced change in their work; how do they contribute to the social and learning aspects of university life? Therefore, the next chapter describes the methodology through which these questions have been researched.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

Academic studies and commentary considering the work experience of university staff offered a view of a workplace that had been subject to change. Staff were reported as having experienced this change with distress and, occasionally, pleasure at new opportunities. Universities were presented as peopled organisations, stratified by occupational status with a core purpose of furthering learning. Catering, caretaking and security staff were not represented in the literature, raising questions of:

- how do these staff experience their work?
- how have they experienced change in their work?
- how do they contribute to the social and learning aspects of university life?

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to gain insight into the perspectives of the work of university catering, caretaking and security staff, within their place of work. This presented two problems; the first was in exploring the significance of the mundane, everyday transactions that occur in a social organisation. The second was in gathering information about how people in the lowest paid jobs in an organisation experienced their work, when this information would then be disseminated in their workplace. This Chapter discusses the research strategy and methods used to investigate these views. It is presented in three sections. The first considers the research strategy, the second relates the procedure of data collection, with its attendant difficulties and pleasures. The final section describes the process of data analysis.

4.1 **Research Strategy**

A case study was chosen as a useful research strategy in attempting to understand social and institutional processes and the meaning of everyday actions and interactions to the people involved (Hartley, 2004). It is suggested the case study is particularly appropriate as a strategy for investigating perspectives of everyday-life and reporting them to people from groups other than academics (Stake, 1978). This was an important consideration with this research as it may be of interest to the staff themselves and their Union representatives.

It was decided to limit the study to one organisation. The main trade off between researching single and multiple cases is that of depth and breadth. Multiple cases offer the potential to highlight commonalities and differences between cases (Hartley, 2004). This is preferable where resources are sufficient. Inevitably the same amount of research resource spread across one or more cases determines how much attention each can receive. Time restraints and the resources available to a lone researcher established the parameters of three areas of interest in one university. This allowed a focus on the experience and contribution of these staff in each occupation group and collectively. A dissonance between observed staffing on site and the staff represented in the literature relating to universities as a workplace had given rise to this research. The University where this observation had been made was selected for the case study. I had been given institutional agreement to study staff experience as a doctoral student. This gave me an understood role within the university, providing a platform for the research and negotiating position with gatekeepers (Bell, 1999; Flick 2006).

Criticisms of case studies were taken into account in study design. These are concerned with a lack of theoretical framework and an inadequate contribution to developing a body of knowledge.

> "Without a theoretical framework, a case study may produce fascinating details about life in a particular organisation but without any wider significance." (Hartley, 2004 p.324)

There is a fundamental contradiction in research about working processes in the workplace. In order to observe the structure and perspective of the actual, rather than assumed or projected, institutional views it is necessary to enter a particular workplace. However the exploration of a specific work environment can be disconnected from information on its context within the local labour market and employment sector (Thompson & Vincent, 2010). In order to consider the economic and social environment in which work operates it is necessary to locate the specific place in a wider context. In this way to study one workplace through ethnographic engagement may provide insufficient commonality of method to allow for meta-analysis and a contribution to the wider understanding of work. Such studies can be criticised as creating a body of research that cannot contribute to theoretical understanding of work, proportionate to the time and work involved (Hodson, 2001).

This study has been strongly influenced methodologically by the arguments of Edwards (2010) over how to approach the workplace as a researcher. He offers a number of components for a labour process analysis, which address both lack of context and insufficient commonality of method. The first component is to investigate how a specific labour process is organised, then to determine the category of work situation and to place it in an organisational and economic context. The purpose of this is to identify the extent to which these factors impact on the workplace. The next investigatory focus is the actual work tasks undertaken, together with the managerial controls of these tasks. The workers' responses to these controls, individually and collectively, formally and informally can then be considered. The final stage would be comparisons, within the study and across the research

literature. This also addresses the criticism that labour process analysis case studies offer a theoretical framework but lack adequate contextualisation.

Linking the experience of work in one workplace to a wider social and economic context does not wholly address the concern about the single case study and its potentially idiosyncratic nature. Located in one place at one moment in time such a study cannot be used to generalise findings to other populations or organisations. However, I take the view that context-dependent information is valuable as a means of understanding and communicating information (Flyvbjerg (2006). The suggestion is that it allows people to locate themselves within the reported experience of others. This then enables a connection to be made between lived experience and theoretical discussion (Siggelkow, 2007).

> "The goal is not to make the case study be all things to all people, The goal is to allow the study to be different things to different people."
> (Flyvbjerg, 2006 p. 238)

This thesis has been written in a straightforward way, offering sufficient detail for readers to determine similarities with other organisations and establish their own meaning (Stake, 1995). This detail also allows the individual study to contribute to a wider analysis. Providing detail of research procedures enables other researchers to carry out similar studies in other organisations to consider similarities and differences (Yin, 1981). Providing detail of context and findings enables people to recognise whether the reported experience may apply to their own organisational and individual situation (Siggelkow, 2007). I have assumed a readership of staff working in these occupations, trade unionists and others interested in the dynamics of work.

An inductive, staged approach was indicated, building on the information gained and contacts made at each stage. Case studies can be of deductive or inductive design, in deciding between these approaches consideration was given to whether enough was known of the experience of these staff to enable a pre-determined enquiry to be carried out (Gilham

2000; Hartley 2004; Yin, 2009). There was nothing in the literature of direct relevance and scant indicative information. Areas of work had been observed and could be deduced from documents, but it was not know what would be considered important by these staff. Their perceptions of other university population groups and the nature of informal work practices were unknown. It was not known what the staff's experience of research was or what their reaction to research would be on the spectrum of hostility through indifference to active interest and engagement.

This study values the self-reporting of subjective experience, supplemented by observation of action within context, interpreted by an individual perspective. This raises the question of how such a study can be assessed by others (Porter, 2007; Denscombe, 2002; Baxter & Eyles, 1997)? There cannot be established protocols for carrying out inductive case studies, they are therefore open to criticism of lack of rigour and the potential for a researcher pursuing pre-conceived ideas (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). I was positioned as an interpreter within the situation being studied (Stake 1995). The understanding reached was affected by the interplay between the research participants, process, timing and myself. Attempts to identify general criteria for such an assessment can be considered as inherently flawed given the multiple layers of interpretation, through participants, researcher and reader (Rolfe, 2006; Garratt & Hodkinson 1998). The use of multiple sources of data and varied methods of data collection, allows the information relating to any one area to be integrated from different sources (Yin, 2009). This goes some way to redress the subjective interpretation of data. The detailed description of the research procedure is also intended to enable the reader to determine whether these meet their own criteria for plausibility and credibility.

4.2 **Methods**

The purpose of the study was to research perceptions of their work of these staff, within their place of work. The research methods were chosen to address the identified limitations of case studies and self-reporting of low status staff within their workplace. Drawing on the ethnographical tradition of workplace studies to inform data collection and researcher behaviour.

Face-to-face conversations were considered the most effective data gathering method. The most widely used means of investigating the experience of work has been surveys (Strangleman & Warren, 2008). Contemporary studies considering the experience of University staff have mainly used questionnaires, either as the sole data gathering technique or as an initial trawl from which individuals are selected for interviews. This is a useful method of gaining information from a wide or representative sample of a large population but may be an inappropriate method for this group. The use of surveys requires a research population willing to engage with them and a means of devising useful questions. Tytherleigh et al (2005) included manual staff in their survey and got a low response compared to that from other staff groups. It seemed likely that administrative and academic staff would be more used to receiving and returning research requests, have easier work based access to the internet and be more able to complete them in work time. It would also have been difficult to design a useful questionnaire. Previous research has derived the questions to pose in surveys from the literature. For manual staff in universities there was insufficient information to form precise questions known to be relevant. Anyone not adept at writing or fluent in English would be hindered in putting their views. The intention was to gain some insight into peoples' perceptions of their experience. This assumed that each person had something unique to recount which could be missed by a standardised instrument (Stake 1995).

I wanted to engage with staff at the point their capacity for work is deployed, at their workstation during their shift. It seemed likely that the work tasks and social interactions during these encounters would prompt information. Many of these staff were observed to carry out set tasks within set times, often at set work stations. There was little room for formal interviews. The decision was made to use opportunities for unstructured interviews which could be either arranged or could arise through informal conversations without preparation (Flick, 2006). These would allow greatest scope for participants to raise aspects of their experience most relevant to themselves. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). There was scant information in the literature regarding what might be of importance to this group in this work environment or of the language they would use to express it. The use of unstructured interviews would help to avoid imposing restrictions, pre-selected areas of importance or inhibiting participants from using their own language. An opening question was used to allow participants to talk freely within a facilitated conversation. Comparative information from each individual was not sought, rather each interview informed the next. However, this form of conversation does carry the greatest risk of unknowing researcher influence. More structured interviews carry the opposing risk of restricting information elicited to the pre-determined interest of the researcher.

Observing the informal activities and interactions of staff may provide information not offered in conversation and illuminate aspects of their social interactions. A university is a hierarchical organisation, stratified according to occupation. It was considered likely that these staff would be inhibited in discussing their informal work activities. It was also not known how they would position me, an outsider, within the hierarchy in an academic dominated organisation (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Serrant-Green, 2002). It was possible they would therefore offer a view of work they wanted presented to the employing organisation. The purpose was to consider the everyday activities of staff and this carries the risk of them being so familiar they do not occur to people to recount or are not considered worth mentioning. Observation might reveal information not available from interviews (Patterson et al, 2009). Observations are inevitably selective, it is not possible to give attention to everything at any given time (Flick, 2006). Non-participant observation was

useful in becoming familiar with the presence of these staff within the physical environment of the organisation (Rugg & Petre 2007). It also provided information on aspects of social norms and interactions. Participant observation enabled me to be present in situations not otherwise accessible. This provided opportunities to listen to conversations amongst colleagues and for informal chats with staff who had not responded to requests for interviews. Conversations with staff in their workplace and observations of their activities and interactions raised ethical questions concerning openness of purpose and the protection of participants.

4.3 **Ethical Considerations**

The desire to avoid harm to research participants has given rise to ethical codes for research involving people. The general principles of such codes require informed consent from participants, the protection of anonymity and freedom to engage with and withdraw from participation in the research at any time. Attention must be given to the effect of the research on participants including consequent relationships between gatekeepers and participants (British Sociological Association, 2002; Denscombe 2002). How these principles are implemented during the research process has to be considered within each situation (Flick, 2006). There are particular concerns with case studies in that unplanned encounters can arise and many encounters are informal in nature (Yin, 2009).

There are benefits in covert research but these were not considered sufficient to outweigh a preference for being open. Engaging in conversations with and observations of these staff in their workplace raised both ethical and practical questions. The advantage of covert research is in avoiding instigating changes in behaviour. It allows access to those aspects of work considered individually or organisationally private (Toynbee, 2003). There were two practically possible ways of gaining covert access to the workplace. By adopting a student identity or by attempting to get a catering job. Presenting as a student would also have facilitated employment, as students were sometimes employed on temporary contracts to cover early evening catering shifts, I have applicable employment experience. A

disadvantage of this was the practical limitation to one occupation, one shift and one site. Using a student identity meant roaming access to public areas only and limits on asking questions. As well as practical problems there are serious concerns over the ethical position of forming relationships with people for a hidden purpose and the practice of deception in research (British Sociological Association, 2002; Toynbee, 2003; Denscombe, 2002). In this case there was also concern about consequences in the workplace following publication within the organisation. The research purpose was known to academic staff. If covert activity had aroused hostility there was a risk of consequent tensions between staff groups, it may also have aroused suspicion towards student research in the future.

It was decided that overt research was likely to be most useful in informing the research questions and was personally more ethically acceptable. Throughout the study I identified myself where feasible, stating the research aims and seeking informed consent from participants. During general non-participatory observations this was not possible, however, these all took place in public areas. Overt research also has benefits and disadvantages. It allows interviews to be openly held and recorded. It enables staff unwilling to be observed to state their wishes and for those wishes to be respected. Requests for access to locations and documents not in the public arena can be made. Interpretations of data can be checked and the meaning of culturally prevalent terms can be explored. However, overt organisational research requires the identification of and negotiation with, gatekeepers who control access to both people and venues (Hartley, 2004; Stake, 1995). It also risks the disadvantage of being seen as an emissary of those gatekeepers (Flick, 2006). This can build in delays to engaging with staff and impose limitations of activity, a not unusual difficulty of organisational research (Smith, 1997).

The practicalities of lengthy research in a large organisation raised difficulties in maintaining the distinction between covert and overt activity (Moore & Savage, 2002). The perspective I brought to this research is that of an outsider (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Serrant-Green, 2002). I have forty years experience of working for a living which includes only three short periods working in universities, all more than twenty-five years ago. My engagement with

the university was for the purpose of researching aspects of working practice. Any information I encountered therefore was potentially useful in forming a view of the workplace values, discourses and practices. Wherever I went on site, for whatever reason, there were opportunities for listening, watching and talking with university staff. To explain my presence and negotiate every conversation, irrespective of topic, with everyone I encountered was not practicable, nor necessary. I was also assisted by library, administrative and technical staff and I attended meetings and training sessions with staff from other occupations. In most of these interactions I responded openly to any questions about the study but rarely initiated such discussion. These contacts were helpful in establishing aspects of workplace context but were not necessarily dictated by research priorities. They were not part of the research focus and have not been reported. Some difficulty did arise in recognising the parameters of socialising with staff. Spending time in a peopled environment, acquaintances developed, leading to simple acts such as having lunch or coffee with someone. An early decision was made to respect the privacy of such encounters, allowing for 'off duty' time (Serrant-Green, 2002)

With research participants, consideration was given to information provision, respect and anonymity. My aim was to give clear written information about the study, including security of records, limitations to anonymity and publication intentions. To facilitate informed consent, I ensured time to discuss the research with staff in interviews and participant observations (Oliver, 2003). In non-participant observation it was not practicable to request consent, these observations took place only in public areas (Flick, 2006). The people asked to engage with the research were adult staff members and responsible for their own decisions to participate. No attempt was made to overcome hostility or persuade people to engage.

An important ethical concern was that the research would be publically discussed within the organisation in which staff worked. Participants were engaged in the social processes of the organisation and therefore known to each other and to the wider community. Raising their profile to academic and managerial colleagues, however slightly, could have beneficial and

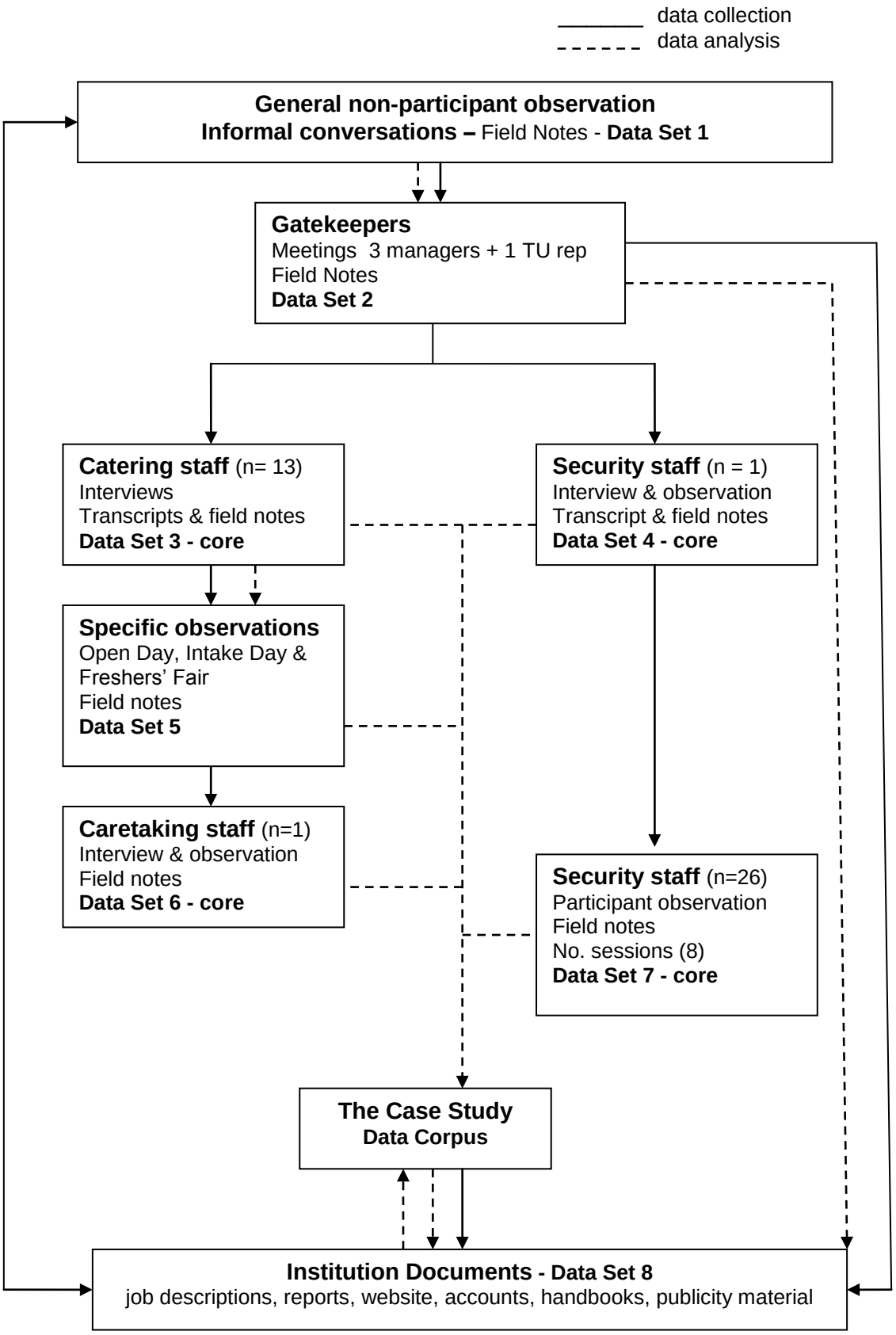
detrimental results. The study was non-interventionist, with no attempt to initiate change, however it was possible there could have been some unintentional effect (Rugg & Petre 2004). It was possible that published information could be used punitively in the future, to close loopholes and increase control, requiring consideration of whether to withhold items of data (Oliver 2003). Unforeseen ethical concerns could still arise in that their decision may not be fully informed. Elliott and Williams (2001) raise the paradox of seeking informed consent at the start of a process which could take unexpected directions.

This highlights an inevitable tension within the construction of a case study report between the need to protect research participants and to provide a sufficiently detailed description to allow for reader assessment. How to maintain internal anonymity whilst allowing external intimacy? Measures were taken to preserve the anonymity of participants. I transcribed recordings of interviews, removing or coded identifying information. Complete anonymity cannot be possible within a group with considerable experience of each other. They have knowledge of idiosyncratic vocabulary and information with which to identify participants in specific events (Richardson & McMullan, 2008). There is a difficulty in ensuring institutional anonymity whilst providing contextual detail concerning local employment conditions. Some geographical information has been edited to avoid identification, whilst recognising this cannot be anything but partial. References to literature and university documents which identified the institution were provided to the examiners but have been removed from the text and references section in this published version of the thesis. The need to balance these conflicting requirements runs throughout the description of the procedure of the study, which follows.

4.4 **Research Procedure**

Figure 4.1 outlines the process of data collection and analysis showing three data sources were accessed continuously over the study, non-participant observation, informal conversations and documents. Interviews and specific observations were sequential. Throughout the study I was locating and reading university documents, some provided by participants, others found through the university website. They included documents for internal use, such as meeting notes and training materials, and those created for external access such as the university website and publicity materials. These were used to establish the organisational context of the work of these staff. A preliminary analysis was carried out following each stage with the intention of informing subsequent stages. A thorough analysis across all types of data was undertaken on completion of data collection.

Figure 4.1 - Data Collection and Analysis

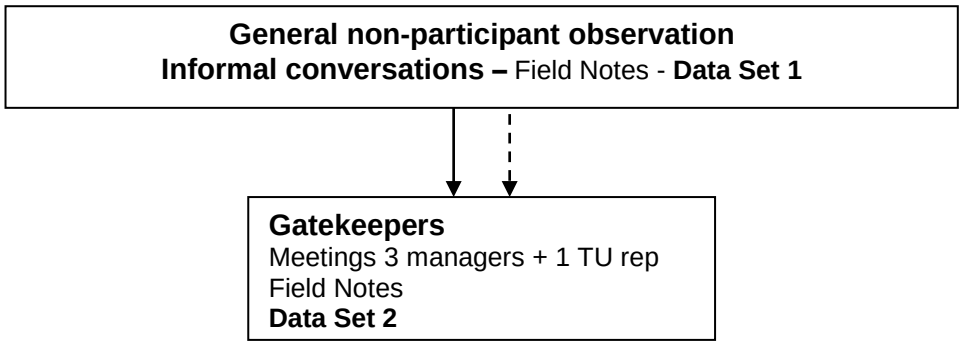


The process of the study was interspersed with presentations and discussions. These challenged thinking and elicited anecdotes from other university staff. The chronology of the study is given in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 - Chronology of Study

Activity	**Date**
Meeting with Trade Union Representative	Dec 2008
SRHE Conference - Attendance, observation, conversation	Dec 2008
Ethics approval requested Ethics approval gained	Feb 2009 May 2009
Catering management Correspondence begins Meeting Agreement to access to 1st 2 sites gained Agreement to access to 3rd site gained Agreement to access to 4th site gained	 09 Dec 2008 18 Dec 2008 06 May 2009 20 May 2009 03 June 2009
UWBS Research Conference - Presentation "And Who Else?" -	21 Jan 2009
CETL Student Seminar – Presentation "And Who Else"	03 March 2009
Caretaking and Security management Request via Catering Manager Referral to and contact with site manager Meeting with sites manager and agreement to access	 18 Dec 2008 11 June 2009 15 June 2009
Catering staff interviews Site 1 Site 2 Site 3 Site 4 (catering occupation manager)	 19 May 2009 22 May 2009 15 June 2009 16 June 2009
Security officer interview and observation	13 July 2009
Specific Observations Open Day Check-in Day Freshers' Fair	 22 Aug 2009 13 Sep 2009 15 Sep 2009
Caretaking staff interview and observation	13 Sept 2009
Security Staff Training Sessions Correspondence with Trainer Session 1 and 2 Session 3 and 4 Session 5 and 6 Session 7 and 8	 07 August 2009 11&12 Nov 2009 16&17 Nov 2009 23&26 Nov 2009 09&10 Feb 2010
BUIRA Study Group – Presentation "And Who Else"	18 Nov 2009
SRHE Newer Researchers Conference – Presentation "Staffing the Physical & Social Aspects of University Life"	07 Dec 2009
UWBS Research Conference – Presentation "The Everyday Things"	13 Jan 2010
CETL Reflective Event - Presentation "Kindness"	22 June 2010
DISA Lecturers Conference - Presentation "Student/Staff Interactions"	15 June 2011
Thesis	January 2012

4.4.1 Stage 1 – Orientation and Access



During the study I was based on three university sites in turn, with a workstation in a shared room in each case, with consequent opportunities for observations and informal conversations. Aspects of social norms including a range of dress codes attached to different occupation groups and seniority were observed. I adopted an informal style of clothing. Casual conversations with catering, caretaking and security staff were possible, as were observations of the social interactions of these staff. Meetings with managers and other staff provided introductory information, enabling orientation within the organisational structures (Hartley, 2004). The university website was useful in provided information on organisational structure, locations and marketing.

I had access to general observation of work activities and environment. Access to staff for the purpose of data collection was approved by a university ethics committee. My intention was to engage with them at their workstations during work activities. These staff had the lowest hierarchal status of the university workforce, permission from relevant managers was therefore sought, from courtesy and to avoid putting staff in a difficult position if they were willing to participate. The process of negotiating access offered some insight into the layers of management impacting on these staff.

Two senior operational managers were selected as key gatekeepers to access. They were identified through the organisational information supplied on the University website and through conversations with staff. First contact was made by phone call and consequent correspondence was through e.mail. One agreed to meet me, one delegated this to a relevant site manager. Both agreed to data collection taking place during working hours, with some constraints. These meetings confirmed that the experience of these staff had not been researched before within the university. A catering manager confirmed that response to an e.mail survey was likely to be poor, staff had recently given a 25% response to a management initiated survey on an important aspect of work. It was unlikely that a request from an unknown researcher would have more success. It was indicated by managers that although staff might be willing to engage with a researcher they would be wary.

It had been my intention to recruit participants by direct contact and to interview a small purposive sample in each of the three occupation groups concurrently. It was considered important to avoid the intervention of managers because of the implication that the research was instigated by them or that identifying information would be fed back to them. However, once operational managers had been approached, their preferences and decisions had to be accommodated. These managers preferred to make the first approach to staff themselves. Catering managers on five sites asked staff if they would be willing to speak to a researcher. Staff on four of the sites offered to do so. I then contacted these managers to arrange convenient times to go and meet themselves and willing staff. This resulted in thirteen interviews.

A site manager with responsibility for security and caretaking staff offered to distribute a letter, outlining the research (Appendix 1). Staff could then contact me directly if they were willing to participate. This short letter was substituted for a fuller information sheet on the advice of the manager, who thought it unlikely that staff would read anything longer. Most did not, later conversations with staff revealed some remembering seeing and binning it while two others vaguely remembered something about it. It was agreed that to follow-up

the letter by approaching people who had not responded would constitute harassment. He was concerned that the research activity could hamper staff in their work if many participated. However, he thought this unlikely, being pessimistic about expected take-up, an accurate view. Only two people replied, a brief correspondence with one of these about time and dates did not result in a meeting. One security staff member did agree to my accompanying him whilst on duty.

This very limited access to security and caretaking staff was resolved by two fortunate encounters. During a conversation with a security officer he mentioned a current National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training programme for security staff. Later there was a chance meeting with an NVQ assessor to whom I was introduced. I asked if I could attend some of the training sessions. Contact details for the course provider were given, contact was made and permission to attend gained, subject to the agreement of the participants. The relevant occupational manager also agreed. An external gatekeeper was therefore instrumental in facilitating access to staff. Further opportunistic recruitment occurred during an observation of two caretakers. I asked both if they would participate in interviews, one refused, one agreed.

During this process of negotiating access to staff I met with a mainly friendly response. I benefited from the goodwill accorded to students. One gatekeeper said they liked to help students with their studies where possible, another had done a dissertation herself and knew how difficult access to participants could be. Two interviewees indicated they were happy to talk to a student to help out. This co-operation continued throughout the interviews and participant observations that formed Stage 2 of the procedure.

4.4.2 Stage 2 – Interviews and Specific Observations

Arrangements for access to staff took between five and six months, a consequence of this was that formal engagement with staff groups was sequential rather than concurrent. Interviews with catering staff happened first, then interviews with caretaking and security staff, then participant observation with security staff.

4.4.2.1 Interviews with Catering Staff

Catering staff (n=13)
Interviews
Transcripts & field notes
Data Set 3 - core

Catering staff worked in a variety of outlets distributed through five university sites. Interviews took place in the main refectory on four sites. These were large rooms with a demarcation between staff and general seating, achieved by perforated screens and the shape of the rooms. There were large, continuous, windows providing natural light and allowing two way visibility. Interviews, lasting between 15 and 90 minutes, took place at, or close to people's work stations, with a variety of interruptions by customers and colleagues. Some ended with staff being called away to a pressing work task. All participants were on duty and wore their uniforms. Most people had agreed to participate without much information from their managers on what it was about. Discussion of the purpose of the research, talking through an information sheet and consent form (Appendix 1) and answering questions, effectively started the interviewee talking about their work. Where necessary, a stimulus question "What's it like working for the University"? was asked. Prompts were used to elicit further information and to regain focus after an interruption. In most cases factual information concerning length of employment, sites worked on and different jobs held, emerged in the course of the interview, if not it was requested at the end. People were asked whether they agreed to being audio recorded during the meetings. Six agreed, seven preferred not to be, agreeing to notes being taken. Table 4.2 summarises this participation.

In attempting to take detailed notes, the focus was on participant information with my interjections and supplementary questions being sometimes missed. Process notes considering the overall sense of the interview and any non-verbal information were written after sets of interviews.

Table 4.2 – Catering Staff Interviews

Person	Contract weeks	Years at UoW *	Sites Worked	Jobs Held	Sex	Audio or Notes
1	42	15+	2	1	F	Notes
2	52	10+	All	1	F	Notes
3	52	3+	1	1	F	A + N
4		3+		1	F	A + N
5	34	15+	6	4	F	Notes
6	52	15+	2	1	F	Notes
7	52		1	1	M	Audio
8	42	5+	2	2	F	Audio
9	34	5+	2	3	F	Notes
10	34	5+	4	1	F	Notes
11	42	15+	2		F	Audio
12	52	5+	1	1	F	Notes
13	52		1	1	M	Audio

* Years worked at the university ranged from 3 to 30+, the grouping in the table reflects a participant pointing out that stating the actual number would identify individuals.

Interviews were carried out wherever people were working. Some were interviewed at their workstations, a till and serving counters. In these circumstances they were within hearing range of people passing by. When staff were approached by customers I stepped back while they were served. These interruptions were an opportunity to observe interactions and catch up on note taking. It was noticeable how competently staff picked up their thread after interruptions, taken to be an indication of their work practice. A technical lesson was learned, do not put a digital recorder on a metal counter next to a coffee machine that grinds

beans. Other interviews took place at tables in the refectories, staff were not engaged in work activities but would occasionally have to break off. This was in response to a query, because of a surge in customers or to meet a service deadline. During these interviews the notebook and recorder rested on the table between the interviewee and myself. Interviewees were in sight of, but out of hearing of, colleagues and customers. Occasionally their colleagues walked past and there was conversation and banter between them and the interviewee. Laughter between these people and with me was frequent. Over the course of interviews it became clear several staff had worked together for many years. This was a hospitable group of people offering me a hot drink on several occasions as well as an unusually large portion of lunch. During these interviews comments were made illuminating ways in which I was seen, as a student, as a woman engaged in mid-life training, as someone likely to understand hot flushes and appreciate traditional puddings.

Two catering staff offered to be interviewed together, thinking they might trigger recollections and comments in each other. They had started at the same time and taken very different routes which they thought might be interesting. There was a difference in fluency of recounting between them, with one person needing more encouragement to talk. However, once they began to speak of their experience this hesitation ended. It was more difficult to record information from two people whilst maintaining contact between us. My use of shorthand evoked reminiscences linked to gender and age group

Throughout interviews staff talked about aspects of their jobs concerning employment conditions, activities and social interactions of their jobs. Themes identified in preliminary analysis were grouped in four categories. These related to aspects of overall attitude to the job and the place of work within life; change; variety of work activities and locations; social interactions and relationships. Of these social interactions with students received most attention.

4.4.2.2 Interview and Observation with a Member of Security Staff

Security staff (n=1)
Interview & observation
Transcript & field notes
Data Set 4 - core

One security officer had agreed to me accompanying and interviewing him on shift. We met, by arrangement, at the door of a building where he was on duty. The information sheet was provided, the research and my status discussed, a consent form signed and agreement to audio recording gained. It was agreed that encounters with other people whilst I was with him, would not be recorded. The period of observed duty comprised static duty on the front and then back door of one building, followed by patrol duty. This was on another part of the Campus, necessitating a short car journey and a walk. Audio recording was used while static. When moving between sites and patrolling notes were taken, a recorder being considered inconvenient and intrusive. The recorder had to be held between us, he couldn't wear a microphone because of a crackly material uniform jacket and a communications radio. One short exchange whilst standing beside a noisy, busy main road is inaudible on the recording. There were many encounters with people with frequent greetings and exchanges. Some of these became prompts for recounted reflections on aspects of his work. Work tasks and venues also provided prompts for stories, explanations and descriptions.

This observation and interview indicated a role for security staff in establishing a friendly, welcoming environment for students. This reinforced the initial analysis of information from catering staff which had indicated helpful interactions with students. I therefore undertook observations at the times of students' first contact with these staff, their early experiences of the University. The purpose of these observations was to give attention to the starting point of relationships between these staff and students. Notes were taken, where practicable, during observations or immediately afterwards.

Specific observations
Open Day, Intake Day & Freshers' Fair
Field Notes
Data Set 5

4.4.2.3 Open Day

A series of these events each year provide opportunities for prospective students and their families and friends to visit the university. There are tours of the campus and opportunities to talk with current students, academic and support staff.

> "Open Days are your chance to get all the information you need to plan your future.
> - get a taster for student life
> - discover courses designed to prepare you for the realities of working life
> - talk to our experts for advice on applying, studying, careers .. and more
> - find out the latest on fees and funding
> - get a feel for the campuses, accommodation and student life"
>
> (university website, 2011)

Observations were carried out at the main campus. The event was held during student holidays and was the main activity on the campus. An arrangement to accompany a security officer was cancelled when he was allocated to duties in a location not open to me. General observations were made in a central courtyard, refectory and café which were very busy. I accompanied a tour to four buildings on the campus, attended a marketing talk and a tour of student accommodation. Most of the prospective students identified were young, many accompanied by two or more older people assumed to be family members, in some cases of

three generations. My taking notes did not seem to attract notice, it was an information gathering event. Remarks addressed to me indicated an assumption that I was a visitor. There was competition for student income, with people outside the main entrance and university halls of residence marketing newly built, commercially owned, student accommodation.

4.4.2.4 Intake Day

This took place on the Sunday preceding the start of the new academic year. It was the day when most residential students, new and returning checked-in halls of residence. I went to one of the smaller sites, travel to the main site being hampered by a train strike. Observations took place from a convenient area of seating close to the reception desk where people came to check-in. Notes could be written unobtrusively. I discussed the research with the three staff working at the reception desk and was given permission to observe by each. All conversations held at the reception desk were audible including remarks between staff. People approaching the reception desk all appeared to be students wanting to check-in, report a problem or ask for information. I also attended a welcome talk for new students. One of the caretakers on duty agreed to an interview which is described next.

4.4.2.5 Interview and Observation with Caretaker

Caretaking (n=1)
Interview & observation
Field notes
Data Set 6 - core

This fifty minute interview was held in the late afternoon of Intake Day in an empty refectory, which prompted reminiscences of busier times. The research was discussed, an information sheet offered and retained and consent form signed. The stimulus question “What’s it like working for the University?” was posed. An occasional clarifying question was asked. There was no need for prompt questions, the participant was fluent and there were no interruptions.

Some of the content related to incidents during the day, part of which I had observed. The interview ended when he was called away by radio to show a new student and her father around. They agreed to me accompanying them on a tour of the accommodation. I took detailed notes during the interview and jotted notes while walking around campus.

4.4.2.6 Freshers' Fair

The next observation of the students' arrival at the university was at Freshers' Fair. The first week of the academic year was deemed 'Welcome Week' for new students. It was a busy time in which students familiarised themselves with the environment. Academic schools offered inductions and administrative tasks were accomplished. On one day of this week the social infrastructure of the university was introduced with clubs, societies and local agencies staffing stalls. Stalls were set up at the main site in a central courtyard, sports and student union halls. It was a lively scene, the venues became full of people, stallholders vied for attention, music played from a platform provided by a local radio station. I visited the halls but no members of catering, caretaking or security staff appeared to be present. It was also fruitless as I am short, the rooms were crowded and all I could see was the backs of people around me. Observations were carried out mainly in the, café, refrectory and courtyard where security staff were patrolling, caretaking staff clearing litter and catering staff doing brisk trade. Unobtrusive observation was facilitated by the number of people sitting around, although complicated by lengthy conversations with chatty students sitting down to rest beside me.

This non-participant observation of events in which new students engaged with the university placed catering and caretaking staff to the fore. The next part of the study focused on the security staff.

4.4.2.7 Participant Observation with Security Staff

Security staff (n = 26)
Participant observation
Field Notes
No. sessions (8)
Data Set 7 - core

It was agreed that I could attend a number of staff training sessions. These meetings were part of a NVQ Level 2 programme offered by an external provider. Participant observations were carried out with four groups in eight training sessions, which took place on two sites. Table 4.3 shows the attendance, duration and content of the sessions.

Table 4.3 – Security Staff Training Sessions Observations

Session	Sex		Duration	Content
	M	F		
TO1.1	3	1	4 hours	Drugs Health & Safety Fire
TO1.2			4 hours	
TO2.1	4	0	4 hours	
TO2.2			4 hours	
TO3.1	6	1	4 hours	
TO3.2			4 hours	
TO4.1	14	1	7 hours	CCTV
TO4.2			7 hours	

Security staff worked shifts in consistent teams, with one supervisor in each team. The first two groups attended in their work team. The third group was attended by staff who had missed previous sessions and were of different teams. Everyone was on shift, all therefore wore uniforms. The fourth group comprised a mixture of staff from different teams and sites, four of whom had attended other observed sessions. In this group two people had just come off night shift, three were going on shift after the training, only those five wore uniform. People attending had between three and twenty-five years employment with the university,

several had worked on sites other than their current place of work. The training was part of a continuing course and the participants knew the trainer well. I was therefore joining groups that were established both as colleagues and as trainees. The question of whether, and to what extent I should participate was discussed with the trainer. My preference was to sit with the group rather than behind or away from them, note taking would then be apparent allowing participants to ask questions and get used to it, avoiding the distraction of obscured activity. The trainer's preference was for me to join the group and interact to least affect the dynamic. Limited participation was agreed with engagement with training materials and occasional participation in exercises.

The trainer had discussed my attendance with each group in my absence and they had agreed. In each I was introduced, the research focus was discussed. Questions were asked including where I was based, how the research had been initiated and how the information would be used. Verbal agreement was requested and given by each individual. It was necessary to take notes at the time because sessions lasted several hours. At the beginning people were glancing over when I was writing. This reduced as they concentrated on the training. It did not reoccur on the second day with any group. In these sessions there were opportunities for informal conversations during breaks and movement from one venue to another. Notes of informal interactions were written immediately after each session with process notes written later.

The sessions were lively, with discussion, engagement in exercises and laughter. Gradually some individuals included me in some exchanges, activities and conversation. There were signs that my presence altered the dynamic of the training sessions to some extent. A comment was made about people cleaning up their language because of me. On occasion my presence was explicitly remembered and my ambiguous role highlighted. When discussing troublesome students one person made a reference that this did not mean me, which seemed to be both an expression of courtesy and a joke. On making a critical statement about academics someone turned to me and clarified they meant academic staff

not me. There was an indication of concern that the research may be promoted by management, with me as *a spy in the camp*. During a break this was discussed further and questions answered. There were a small number of incidents where information was presented with a look towards me as if to stress some significance. Participation in earlier training sessions contributed to acceptance in the larger group when I was greeted and welcomed by people who had already met me.

These observations together with the earlier interviews were considered as core data sets, forming the central focus of the data analysis. This is described in the following section.

4.4.3 Stage 3 - Data Analysis

In this inductive study, data was collected sequentially within each occupation group, alongside continuous, informal data collection. Analysis was also carried out sequentially and continuously. Reflection during this period contributed to observations and guided informal conversations. A formal analysis was carried out manually after the interviews with catering staff in order to inform subsequent forms of data collection. An analysis across all data was completed at the end of data collection, assisted by the software package Nvivo8.

The use of multiple sources of data and different methods of data collection presents some difficulties in analysis. It is necessary to analyse across the entire data of the case study rather than focussing on each set of data individually (Gilham, 2000). Information was collected in different conditions and presented different levels of accuracy and detail in recording. This comprised verbatim transcripts of interviews, notes taken during interviews and participant observations and those written immediately afterwards. As well as this data collected directly from participants there was a wealth of material from general observations, informal conversations and the perusal of documents. It was necessary to determine what, from the wealth of data, should be selected and how data from different sources would be integrated. In this process decisions were made on which areas of the data were to be incorporated into the final narrative (Yin, 1981).

Data that comprised direct conversation with participants or participant observation was designated as core data sets. This retained the primacy of the reported experience of these staff. The more distanced from verbatim recording data is, the greater the mediation of information by the researcher. Since a primary reason for researching their perceptions of work was their absence from the literature relating to university life, these core data sets provided a focus around which the remaining data could be organised. The core data sets were subject to thematic analysis, other data sets were drawn on for supplementary, contradictory or illustrative information. The same form of analysis was used across all data to facilitate consistency of within group and across group analysis.

A clear and useful discussion of the uses and pitfalls of thematic analysis is offered by Braun and Clarke (2006). Their six stage approach has been used as a guide in this study. Thematic analysis is a subjective process, beginning with the researcher's thoughts arising from immersion in the data during and after data collection. Data is then coded, deconstructed into extracts to which labels are assigned. These are then grouped into themes and assigned to wider categories relating to the questions being investigated. Each of these stages moves further away from the participants' words and actions towards the researcher's interpretation (Thorne, 2000). Vigilance is needed to check that the interpretation imposed is not different to that meant by the participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and that contradictions and differences from expectations are retained (Morrow, Rakhsha & Castaneda, 2001). Different modes of analysis and different analysts are likely to attribute different emphasis to aspects of data and may derive different interpretations from it (Savage, 2000).

I transcribed the recordings of interviews verbatim. During this process the material was listened to repeatedly and transcripts read and re-read. Recurring topics were identified tentatively. Extracts from these transcripts were then coded under labels derived from the participants words. Extracts of transcripts of notes from participant observations were then

coded to previously or newly created codes. At this stage all material was coded, nothing was excluded. Notes written after interviews and observations were also transcribed and subjected to the same process.

The coded extracts were then collated into preliminary themes within each data set. Creating provisional data maps for each data set, naming and writing descriptions of the themes prompted reorganisation of the material. As yet no data had been discarded and theme labels were still derived from participants own words. Themes were then grouped into categories, labeled with impersonal titles denoting a further degree of abstraction. At this stage those themes thought to best inform the research questions were selected, other material was put aside. Data maps for each core data set are at Appendix 2. A narrative for each core data set was constructed and used to consider similarities and differences across the three occupation groups. This provided a basis for incorporating information derived from non-core data sets and revisions to final themes across the whole corpus of case study data. The Nvivo8 software was helpful in keeping track of the process. Coding was facilitated by everything being in the same place. It enabled easy linking to the sources of coded extracts, facilitating checking that the meaning had not been lost when disassociated from its context.

During analysis I was holding three strands of enquiry. How do these staff experience their work? How have they experienced change in their work? How do they contribute to the social and learning aspects of university life? A recurring theme was the dynamic between structured, timed, work activities under surveillance and the uncontrolled activity of social interactions. Variety of work activities and locations, both welcomed and resented, increased the range of social contacts these staff experienced. The attitude of staff towards their work and interactions with other people affected how they used the uncontrolled areas of their time at work. It became clear that the area of informal social interactions, especially with students, was important to these staff and could be important to their employer.

The following two Chapters, 5 and 6, present the case study data. In Chapter 5, information relating to the workplace, conditions of employment and work activities of these staff is presented. This establishes the extent to which they were subject to different levels of control and their leeway for discretion and autonomy. Chapter 6 is concerned with their approach to work and the choices they make. Social interaction with students is dominant in the data and the presence of students is a determinant of the university as a specific workplace. Interactions with students are therefore used to illustrate the attitudes of staff to their work and working relationships.

Chapter 5 – The Workplace and the Work

The following two Chapters present the data derived from the qualitative evidence of observations, interviews and conversations. This is placed in the context of a wider analysis of the nature of the particular workplace. This chapter, is concerned with the locality of the workplace, its organisational structure and the work of catering, caretaking and security staff within it. It is organised in four sections. The first relates to the interdependence between the location and the institution. Secondly it describes the specific organisational basis of the work done by the catering, security and caretaking staff. The conditions of work as they are perceived by employees are then addressed. The last section discusses the paradoxical issue of visibility. The ways in which these staff are seen and not seen, watching and watched, essential but also overlooked. This detailed consideration of the workplace establishes the structural parameters within which the attitude of staff to their jobs and to their interactions with students is addressed in Chapter 6. In both chapters, as explained in the methodology discussion, information identifying individuals has been removed. Participant information is identified by occupation. To indicate the mode of data recording and source, extracts from verbatim transcripts are given as quotations, extracts from field notes are in italics, extracts from documents are show in boxes.

5.1 The Work Context

The University is located in the West Midlands, it is among the largest in the country. In 2009 there were over 23,000 students and nearly 3,500 staff. This population was accommodated on an estate comprising four sites with 97 buildings with 169,904 square meters of internal space (HESA, 2011). A further site was shared with the Local Authority.

5.1.1 Regional Employment Context

The West Midlands is one of the nine administrative regions of England, comprising the five counties of Shropshire, Herefordshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, and Warwickshire. The region has an overall population of around five and a half million, with England's second largest city, Birmingham at its heart. The area has undergone industrial decline with overall job loss and some shift from private to public sector employment.

There is a more narrow definition of the West Midlands derived from the boundaries of the, now defunct, Metropolitan County. This comprises the urban conurbations around the cities of Coventry, Birmingham and Wolverhampton with an overall population of around two and a half million (nomis, 2011). This urban definition is more closely aligned to the employment choices of the people participating in this research, so the more useful in considering labour market information. The circumstances for people seeking work in this area are characterised by higher levels of unemployment and lower wages than the average for Great Britain.

Table 5.1 shows a sharper increase in unemployment from an already higher rate.

Table 5.1 – Employment Comparison

West Midlands Metropolitan County Area with Great Britain

	West Midlands Metropolitan County				Great Britain
Year	Population Age 16-64	Employees*	Unemployed		Unemployed
			Number	%	%
2004	1,633,700	1,001,300	87,200	7.2	4.8
2005	1,648,400	1,003,900	87,500	6.8	4.9
2006	1,658,600	995,400	93,400	7.7	5.4
2007	1,665,900	998,700	90,900	7.5	5.2
2008	1,678,400	982,800	119,300	9.8	5.7
2009	1,687,100	961,600	151,100	12.4	7.7
2010	1,696,400	954,600	141,800	11.6	7.7

*excludes self-employed people

Source: Compiled from Office of National Statistics, derived from the Annual Population Survey

Table 5.2 shows an increasing discrepancy between the wages of people in the West Midlands and in the whole of Great Britain, with a structural difference between the wages of men and women.

Table 5.2 – Wages* Comparison
West Midlands Metropolitan County Area (WM) and Great Britain (GB)

Year	Men			Women		
	GB	WM	Difference	GB	WM	Difference
	£	£	£	£	£	£
1997	358	350	- 8	266	251	- 15
1998	374	372	- 2	277	261	- 17
1999	384	379	- 5	289	275	- 14
2000	399	388	- 11	299	284	- 15
2001	417	411	- 8	315	305	- 10
2002	432	422	- 10	331	311	- 20
2003	447	431	- 16	344	320	- 24
2004	461	441	- 20	357	335	- 22
2005	473	457	- 16	372	357	- 15
2006	487	461	- 26	383	365	- 18
2007	500	478	- 22	396	375	- 21
2008	524	500	- 24	413	383	- 30
2009	534	500	- 34	426	403	- 23
2010	540	517	- 23	440	414	- 26

*Median Full-time Weekly Gross Pay by Workplace (rounded to nearest £)
Source: Office of National Statistics

Considerable resources have been applied to regeneration attempts in the region with some success (Advantage West Midlands, 2010). However, energetic modern enterprise has not replaced the mass employment of the declining manufacturing industries. In the last quarter of 2008 the UK economy went into recession amid concerns for the potential impact on the region (Advantage West Midlands, 2009). The House of Commons West Midlands Regional Committee (2009) took evidence from Local Authorities, trade unions, employers and financiers to determine the effect of the recession on the wider region. They concluded the West Midlands had experienced the steepest decline in output and jobs of all regions of

England. This was accounted for by the impact on the region's manufacturing industries which provided 15% of employment. Vehicle manufacture, metal working, ceramics and construction had been hit by falling demand, affecting both the central industries and enterprises in their supply chains. Alongside redundancies people had taken pay cuts and had their working hours reduced. The public sector was also affected, with the West Midlands Local Government Organisation (2009) reporting council staff redundancies, both accomplished and projected and withdrawal from regeneration projects. The financial and retail service sector had also cut jobs. Employment projections for the region were for increasing unemployment with most jobs being lost in lower skilled occupations (Advantage West Midlands, 2009).

These poor regional economic conditions were exacerbated in the sub-region in which the University was located. The historically predominant industries of this area are associated with coal mining, iron, steel and metal goods manufacture. With a population of just under one and a quarter million people with 433,700 people at work, public sector employment accounted for a quarter of all jobs with manufacturing providing 17%. Between January and March 2009, 23% of redundancies in the West Midlands were in this sub-region. The prevailing economic and employment conditions for people seeking work in the vicinity of this University were therefore bleak. The participants in this research were working in occupations designated as low skilled, in the context of a harsh economic situation which was expected to worsen.

Within this context Higher Education offered a relatively prosperous employment sector. Table 5.3 shows the differing sizes of the workforce of the West Midlands universities which collectively spent £1.7 billion in 2009-2010.

Table 5.3 – West Midland Universities 2009-2010

West Midlands Universities	Income £ thousands	Expenditure £ thousands	Staff Headcount*
Aston University	110,510	111,760	2,910
Birmingham University	462,373	440,105	14,120
Birmingham City University	161,813	157,582	3,885
Coventry University	167,629	157,385	5,115
Keele University	114,157	112,315	3,585
Staffordshire University	118,524	117,696	2,430
University of Warwick	408,480	388,906	11,595
University of Wolverhampton	162,660	163,316	3,055
University of Worcester	63,910	55,593	1,150
Total	1,770,056	1,704,658	47,845

* includes only those people with a direct employment contract

Source Compiled from UCAS and Higher Education Statistics Agency

5.1.2 Local Employment Context

The university occupied five sites, three were in city locations, one within an urban conurbation, and one in a more rural location. These areas share an industrial history deriving from deposits of coal, ironstone and limestone. Mines, foundries, engineering and metal goods manufacture provided employment, with towns also developing specialist industries. Industrial activity encompassed car, aerospace, metal goods, construction, leather work, textiles and ceramics. The development of the university was embedded in this industrial landscape.

As noted earlier, from the late 1970s onwards the economy of the West Midlands began to experience relative decline against the UK average. University academic staff may be recruited in the context of a national and even international labour market. The mass of other university employees tend to be drawn from more local labour markets, this is especially true of the occupation groups that are the concern of this research. The locations of the University sites have become characterised by high unemployment rates and low wages. Table 5.4 shows local unemployment rates at a time when the rate for Great Britain was 7.7%.

Table 5.4 – Employed and Unemployed Working Age Population
January 2009

Area	Population	Age 16-64	Employees* %	Unemployed %
West Midlands	2,638,700	1,687,100	56.9	12.4
City Sites Location	238,500	151,900	53.0	13.2
Conurbation Site Location	255,900	157,700	61.6	12.0
Rural Site Location	162,300	105,100	64.8	8.5

*excludes self-employed

Source: Compiled from Office of National Statistics

Table 5.5 shows the areas are subject to wage rates well below those for the country as a whole.

Table 5.5 – Pay Comparisons January 2009

Area	Gross Weekly Pay* £	
	Men	Women
Great Britain	534	427
West Midlands	491	394
City Sites Location	458	357
Conurbation Site Location	450	311
Rural Site Location	493	398

*Median Full-time Weekly Gross Pay by Workplace (rounded to nearest £)

Source: Compiled from Office of National Statistics

Of the three university locations the more rural area had the lowest unemployment and highest wage levels.

Table 5.6 shows that even so, this area was positioned in the bottom third in the English Indices of Deprivation, with the City and urban conurbation locations amongst the most severely deprived areas of the country, with the employment ranking deteriorating.

Table 5.6 - Deprivation - Employment and Income
Ranked for 326 areas in England
(1 most deprived, 326 least deprived)

	2000	2004	2007	2010
Employment				
City Sites Location	40	45	44	24
Conurbation Site Location	42	54	55	31
Rural Site Location	99	104	112	90
Income				
City Sites Location	24	26	22	27
Conurbation Site Location	25	39	32	30
Rural Site Location	85	102	102	89

Source: English Indices of Deprivation (2000, 2004, 2007, 2010)

Although the historical dominance of heavy industry in the area is no longer an economic strength, it was responsible for the development of a purposeful institution of higher education.

5.2 The Workplace

The University developed in the technical strand of higher education through a series of attempts by workers, industrialists and politicians to meet the training needs of developing industries. A Tradesman's and Mechanics' Library offering lectures, a reading room and a book lending service opened in 1835 but did not thrive. It became a Mechanics' Institute in 1847 with continuing funding problems. A Working Mens' College with a wider curriculum was founded in 1857 but survived only eight years. A more successful venture formed around the town's Free Library which had become the repository for the libraries of previous ventures. Lectures were offered in the evenings, public donations provided libraries, equipment, laboratories and classrooms. This collection of activities was formally named the

Science, Technical and Commercial School in 1899. The local industrial base of foundries, engineering and technology was reflected in further developments. By 1930 there were chemical and metallurgical laboratories and a separate engineering and technology site. In 1933 the institution adopted a wider regional role. A period of amalgamation followed with a commercial high school and foundry college joining and eventually merging into a regional College of Technology. In the 1960s the college again expanded. Its first hostel for students and staff opened in 1965 with a new Management and Business Studies centre two years later. The College merged with the College of Art and Design in 1969, becoming a Polytechnic the following year. In 120 years a small, workers' library with meeting rooms had become a national higher education provider. The focus throughout was science, technology and industry supplemented by general education, literature, music, art and design. The 1970s and 1980s continued the expansion and a move to a wider training role. Four Teacher Trainer Colleges and two Nursing Colleges were merged with the Polytechnic which gained and lost sites, buildings and departments along the way. In 1992 the Polytechnic became a University. The industry it had served was in decline, its locality experiencing adverse economic circumstances.

5.2.1 The University Sites

The working conditions of staff and students were affected by the size, age and purpose of the site they worked on. Each site presented different characteristics, reflecting the development of the institution. Collectively they offered the facilities of a small town. Shops, cafes, restaurants, sports centres, libraries, a theatre, a faith centre, advice services, public transport and refuse collection. The University had undertaken a considerable building programme. This had involved the demolition, closing or sale of some buildings and the erection or change of use of others, wryly observed by this member of staff.

> "buildings knocked down, buildings put up … Since I've been here it's been knocked down twice and redone " (Catering 11)

The main site was in a city centre, with two clusters of buildings ranging in age from the 1920s to 2009. One group surrounded a courtyard, turned inwards away from the town and busy roads outside. The other group of buildings was spread between a major road, a large supermarket site and the stadium of the City's football team. Walking around the streets, signs of decline could be observed in boarded-up shops, vacant sites and stalled regeneration projects. In contrast the university sites appeared clean, graffiti free and well maintained. Two other city sites had different histories and functions. The smaller site was in the suburban outskirts, sharing the grounds of a school. The main building was supplemented by aging, temporary structures, a rather run down air was lifted by attractive grounds. The larger, more modern site was a shared endeavour between the City Council and the University. Opened in 1995 a further group of buildings was erected in 2000 with further development planned. The site offered workshops, laboratories, offices and catering facilities. The population here was largely business people and customers with a minority of students. External space was restricted unlike the other sites which had outside areas for social gathering and play. The urban conurbation site was located in a residential area. Once a Teacher Training College it had a mix of some rather run-down and many new buildings. The site was small and easy to navigate, surrounded by sports grounds and terraces. The more rural site was a purpose built university campus on a hill, outside a town, with long views, modern buildings, spacious open grounds and terraces. Standing out amongst the glass is the brick, stone and slate of an 18th century Hall with historical links to the local mining industry.

The University was organised in 10 academic Schools with an additional range of Service Departments. Different curriculum areas were located on different sites. The different facilities attracted different external customers with the resulting social contact being seen as having different qualities.

> *this campus more informal than (site) here is more contained, familiar, friendly … don't get as much attitude.*
> (Catering 1 Notes)

> *(site) is smaller so get to know the staff and students more because less people about, get to see people, familiar faces* (Catering 2 Notes)

> *After being on this Campus wouldn't want to work on main site, find it a bit intimidating, got more problems, we hardly ever do.* (Caretaking15 Notes)

> *Lots of events over the weekends you know judo events and netball events there is always something different going on sports wise, events wise* (Catering 3 Notes)

> "we do have the graduation, you get the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor and then you get the politicians that come down like … we did do a meal and the players (football) came and that was fine (Catering 8)

It may be the people rather than the task that is different.

> *Most difference is number of students on each campus – kitchen and catering dept and other work pretty standardised*. (Catering 2 Notes)

As the university developed changes to sites created new jobs, imposed changes of job and presented opportunities to seek change.

2002 building opened - so new all together (Catering 9 Notes)

(site) developed very quickly, building doubled in size, 4 years built second and in less than 4 years another … they decided to put in (job) applied for it. and got that job. (Catering 5 Notes)

"I started off at (site) ... which has been shut down now, been there for 6 years and was moved up here and been here ever since" (Catering 11)

moved here but didn't want to come … moved when rebuilding (X) working at the lower scale, and offered in (site), more flexibility of work, enjoyed students at (site) came here more variety, enjoyed that more and then chose to stay when chance to return. (Catering 6 Notes)

There were structural tensions in environment and policy which these staff were expected to manage.

there's always issues with parking (Security 14)

Car parking – no student parks (Training Observation 3.1)

football pitch temporary car park (probably be permanent) after complaints from local residents re student parking
(Training Observation 3.1)

Different times of the day, different things important … traffic flow day, car park spaces, security night
(Training Observation 4.1)

Clearing smokers off the steps outside building
(Training Observation 2.2)

Some structural alterations had imposed costs. With the main site being in a city centre, access to car parking was a major concern. For lower paid staff car parking charges were more than an irritant. Three people raised the introduction of car parking fees as influencing their choice of workplace, one explaining

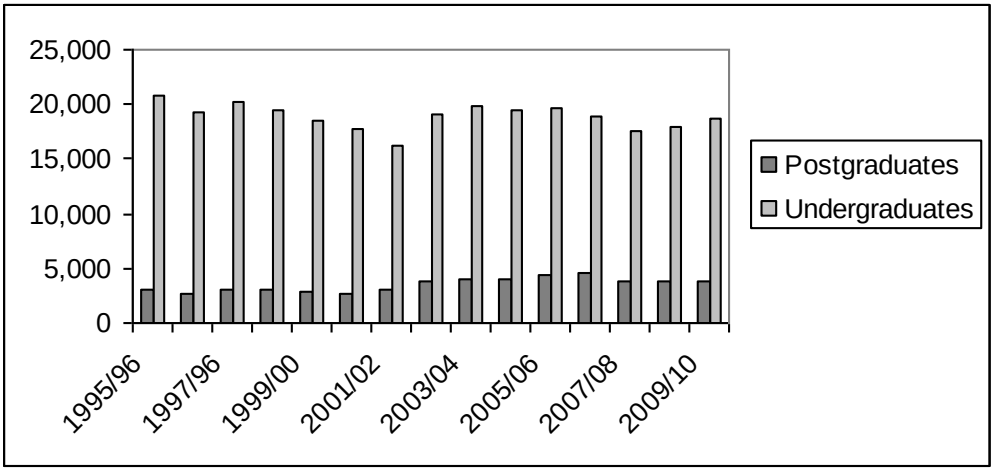
£3.50 to park … main reason for moving £20 per week/£80 per month out of wage (Catering 1 Notes)

These sites accommodated a large number of people using the estate for many different functions. Catering, security and caretaking staff were employed to service the population and estate of the university. The core of the university population was students and staff, with students in the majority.

5.2.2 Students

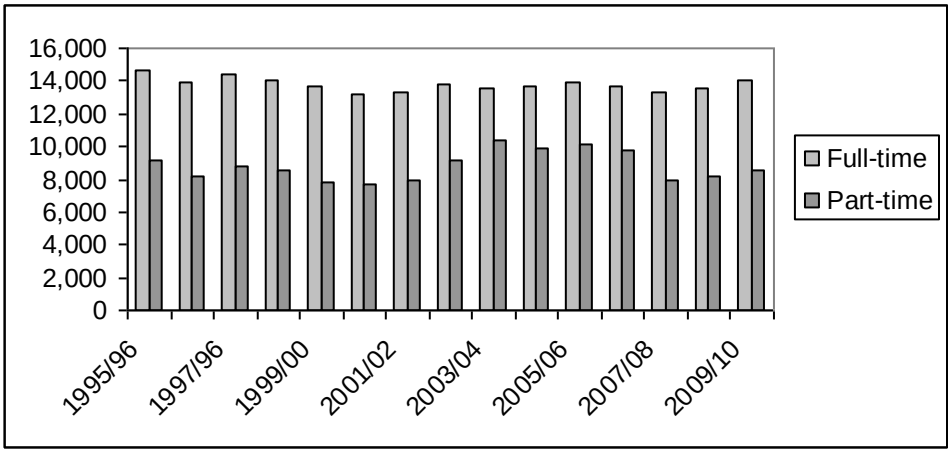
In 2009-10 there were 22,610 students, 83% (18,740) undergraduates and 17% (3,875) postgraduates (HESA, 2011). Figure 5.1 shows student numbers since 1995. Since adopting university status there have been fluctuations in student numbers reflecting political determination of university student places. However, the range has been within 4,000 places, with a fairly consistent upper level. There has been a modest overall rise in postgraduate students, with a change in mode of study, full-time postgraduates nearly doubled in this period, with part-time numbers slightly decreasing.

Figure 5.1 – Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students 1995-2010



The long standing links between the institution and its local economy are reflected in the student body. There was a high level of part-time, mature and local students. Figure 5.2 shows the distribution between full-time and part-time students as a whole, since 1995.

Figure 5.2 – Full-time and Part-time Students 1995-2010



Of the students starting full-time courses in 2008-09, 35% were over 21. Almost all (99.5%) had been to state schools and 22% came from low participation localities (HESA, 2011). Part-time and mature students are more likely to be local people with job and family commitments in the area. Over 80% of the university students lived in their own or their parents' home, with 71% of students living within 20 miles of the University outside term time at the beginning of the study. With 22,610 students there are only 2,000 places in university halls of residence. Students also found accommodation in local areas and recently

developed private provision of halls of residence. Attending the university sites this large body of students encountered the other part of the core university population, the staff.

5.2.3 Workforce

Against the backdrop of relative regional decline and deindustrialisation the university was an important employer, the total income for 2009 was £148,514 million, 60% of which was spent on staff. It employed 3,410 people in a variety of occupations on a full-time, part-time, shift and seasonal basis. Of these staff 1,185 were designated academic, 2,015 non-academic of which 472 were designated manual (HESA, 2011). The focus of this research is the catering assistants, security officers and caretakers whose work is now outlined.

5.2.4 Catering Assistants

> "at the end of the day you need repeat customers to get money through the till." (Catering 4)

Catering staff offered hot and cold food and drinks through seventeen restaurants, cafes and snack bars. Full services were offered from Monday to Friday, with limited provision at weekends on four sites. Opening and closing times varied with main outlets serving breakfast from 8.30 and evening meals ending at 19.45. There were additional opening times for Saturday courses and weekend events, with vending machines available at all times. Catering was also provided for meetings, training courses, events and conferences for university staff and external customers. The formal work activities of Catering Assistants were to prepare and serve food and drink, clear and clean the equipment and areas used, take payment and record sales. Most catering assistants worked in groups in the main refectory on each site, some worked alone or in pairs in small outlets.

5.2.5 Security Officers

> "that's what we come into security for err, the idea is to keep the place secure and the people secure …and you've done your job, haven't you" (Security14)

The responsibilities of security staff were presented as keeping the University's population, estate and property safe. The emphasis was on the safety of people, the primary responsibility being the preservation of life. Their duties fell into three categories, preventing, enforcing and responding. Preventative activities were concerned with encouraging staff and students to take security measures and checking-up on compliance. The estate was secured by locking up, setting alarms, monitoring and maintaining safety equipment and securing hazards. They operated CCTV control rooms, patrolled and maintained a university wide radio network. Their main enforcing activity was the exclusion of unauthorised people, and the management of car park regulations. Responsive duties were concerned with emergencies, accidents, evacuations and calls for help. It was important for staff to maintain accurate records during shifts as they were expected to produce written reports concerning any incident and might have to act as a witness in court. Working late evening and night shifts security staff enabled access to resources and provided staff contact for people using facilities and residences. They kept Learning Centres open till midnight and during public and university holidays, they also staffed the 24 hour IT facilities. The safety of university sites was frequently stated on the university website in describing the different sites. Information materials for residential students made the same point.

> "The campuses also have 24 hour security and CCTV"
> (Residential Services Accommodation Tours leaflet (2009)

5.2.6 Caretakers

> *My brief here is to help students and help everybody and keep the place running smoothly* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

The work of caretakers seemed to be the least clearly demarked job, essentially they kept the organisation functioning. Aspects of their work merged with the jobs of cleaning, maintenance and security staff. They shared responsibility for maintaining the toilets, cleaning windows, collecting and managing litter and clearing up work areas, grounds and car parks. They collaborated with the maintenance staff by reporting major repairs and undertaking minor repairs to plumbing, furniture and buildings, cleaning out drains and gutters. Routine activities related to the everyday functioning of a peopled, flexible organisation. Sorting and delivering post, messages, supplies, furniture and equipment, issuing stores and dealing with lost property. There were rooms to be set up and supplied, buildings to be cleared at the end the day. They staffed reception desks outside the working hours of other staff. Caretaking and security roles were interrelated on smaller sites. Caretakers on two sites had more responsibility for security, on one they formally adopted security roles during specified hours.

Collectively these staff had a presence on all sites at all times, they were mobile around the grounds and buildings and maintained a communications and surveillance network.

5.3 **Conditions of Work**

These staff were directly employed by the University. They described aspects of the terms and conditions of their employment relating to: contracts, pay, shifts, flexibility, hierarchy, training and job security.

5.3.1 Contracts

The contracts under which these staff were employed reflected the employer's need for staff flexibility in order to service its academic and commercial functions. These contracts reflected the academic year, staff were employed on permanent and fixed term contracts. Different contracts were clustered in different occupations. Security and caretaking staff had permanent, 52 week contracts. Catering staff were employed on 52, 42 and 34 week contracts. Fixed term catering contracts did not necessarily denote the actual weeks worked for the university. Staff could work outside their contract for specific events.

Catering outlets stayed open throughout the whole year.

> "we don't necessarily close when the students are off, like now our students finish on Friday but we're open all over the summer" (Catering 3)

On one site catering staff spoke of the student summer vacation as the busiest time. Conferences, summer schools, residential training courses and visitors meant different customers requiring different meals at different times. Formal dinners, buffet lunches and evening barbeques had to be served alongside the routine meals and hospitality for meetings.

Staff on 42 and 34 week contracts could be offered extra work.

> *Out of contract, coming in for extra this week + 2 weeks in August*
> (Catering 10 Notes)

> *This year more work come in, so doing extra week then 2 weeks*
> (Catering 9 Notes)

There was regret at the removal of a summer retainer.

> "when I come here used to get what they called a retainer and they could call you and you'd have to come in and they'd pay wages on top. And then they stopped that and they stopped the retainer" (Catering 11)

The weeks out of contract caused financial difficulty, with extra work being uncertain and payment arrangements problematic.

> "We don't get paid when were not here and that's really hard, I'm on my own anyway … haven't got a partner's wages … six weeks with no wages, which is why I go to (site)" (Catering 8)

> *staff were expecting 5 weeks work but this now going to (site) … so most staff got none of the hours except (name) going for 2 weeks*
> (Catering 9 Notes)

> *have to work week in hand so working one week, then not working two weeks, then back working again two weeks, then off till back on contract in Sept – each time have to work week in hand* (Catering 9 Notes)

Although staff may have fixed term contracts, renewed for years there is no guarantee, making permanent contracts attractive.

> *not paid over summer so just hope to come back in September* (Catering 10 Notes)

> *one year, on casual contract – did we want job - and offered (site) so came to work here* (Catering 10 Notes)

Paid leave was welcomed, staff were entitled to 21 days, rising incrementally to a maximum of 30 days after 25 years, pro-rata to hours worked.

> "I like having the bank holidays off (laugh) and I think you know, when you have like your own holiday entitlement, we do get good holidays here a few days at Christmas a few days at Easter " (Catering 3)

For lower paid workers organisations in the public sector tend to have relatively higher pay levels, subject to national collective bargaining, and offering greater security. This was the case at the university despite funding uncertainty during the research and the proposed changes to university financing as the research neared its end.

5.3.2 Pay

Catering assistants, security officers and caretakers were employed on Grades 1-4. Pay scales in 2009 for a 37 hour week were:

Grade 1	Catering Assistants	£13,085 to £13,787
Grade 2	Caretakers	£14,099 to £15,641
Grade 3	Security Officers (day)	£16,081 to £17,519
Grade 4	Security Supervisors	£18,117 to £19,184

night shift security officers also receive a shift allowance

Source: University document

Table 5.7 shows comparisons between the weekly wages of these staff, local pay for similar jobs and national pay. This agrees with the assessment of one member of staff.

pay always been a little bit above normal (Catering 6 Notes)

Table 5.7 – Weekly Wage 2009 in £s

Occupation	University	Locality*	National Minimum**	National Median***	
				Men	Women
Catering	252 - 265	215 - 277	215	531	426
Caretakers	271 - 301	230 - 246			
Security	309 - 337	240 - 277			

* spot check on local vacancies, calculated as 37 hour week

** October 2009 adults aged twenty-two or more years £5.80 per hour - 37 hour week

*** April 2009 median gross weekly wage, full-time employees

Source: HM Revenue & Customs; Office of National Statistics; Job Centre Plus

5.3.3 Shifts

The University was staffed for 24 hours every day of the year.

> *every day 365 including Christma*s (Caretaking15 Notes)

Security and caretaking staff used to work a 24 hour rotating shift rota. Health concerns resulted in a small number of staff electing to work a permanent night shift with an additional shift allowance. Other staff moved to a rotating seven day rota covering 6.00 to 22.00.

> "2.00 till 10.00 Monday to Friday, we've got somebody working 6.00 till 3.00 half past 3.00, some working umm other shifts like half past 1.00 to 10.00, some people work again 3 days on 3 days off, the nightshift work four days on four days off"
> (Security 14)

Catering staff worked shifts from 8.00 to 21.00. Seasonal change could bring a change in hours as well as site and task.

> *Doing different shifts at (site)* (Catering 9 Notes)

Responding to demand can create practical problems for staff attempting to be flexible towards their employer but having other commitments.

> "Every day starts at 8.00 'o'clock in the morning … As to finish, end of the day that can change completely ... so I have to be a bit flexible in my life "
> (Catering 3)

Comparisons were made with common shift arrangements in other catering jobs.

> *haven't got late nights, weekends, so fixed hours, very few split shifts and not for any length of time, just to get through particular bookings*
> (Catering 5 Notes)

Different shifts brought staff into contact with different groups of the university population.

> "worked between 4 and 8 but mainly in term time, and you get mature students don't you" (Catering 8)

Working shifts meant some members of these occupation groups were a constant presence on university sites.

> "there's always security around all the time" (Security 14)

> *you might be off but we're not* (Catering 5 Notes)

Security and caretaking staff were on site at all times. In addition to their usual tasks, they took over from other staff in the evenings, at weekends and during holiday periods. At these times they staffed reception desks, learning centers, student facilities and the phones. At night they were the only staff present, with responsibility for the safety of residents and visitors and for responding to emergencies.

> Living in Halls Guide 2008-09
>
> "Caretaker and Security Staff are on duty twenty-four hours, seven days a week. They carry out regular patrols around the campus sites however; if you spot anything suspicious please report it straight away. Security staff can be recognised by their distinctive uniform…"

Students were directed towards these staff for help.

> Living in Accommodation Handbook
>
> "There is always someone available at your campus reception if you have any problems or concerns."

Catering staff did not routinely work after 21.00 at night, but they did staff outlets in the larger sites during the weekend. For part-time students attending evening and weekend courses, the catering, caretaking and security staff may have been the only university staff available, other than their tutor. They offered some degree of continuity in staff contact. At other times they may have been the only university employees on site and available to visitors and students.

> "a lot of the foreign students they don't, they don't even go home for holidays, they only go home at their end of term … so I mean some are here, some are here at Christmas, for 2 weeks over Christmas on their own …" (Catering 3)

This constant presence and patrolling meant staff became known to the university population.

> *Walking over to town after the training session with (name) acknowledgements, waves, comments, greetings*
>
> (Training Observation 2 Notes)

While patrolling with a security guard a student approached him to report the loss of a piece of equipment, he said this was a common occurrence.

> "they do come up to us to say somebody's just nicked me, in like in the library, somebody's just nicked my laptop" (Security 14)

5.3.4 Flexibility

From the management perspective, therefore, flexible working and cover of all sites at all times had to be organised, with staff deployed effectively. The University is an organisation with seasonal changes in population and activity. There was a reported change in working patterns linked to an emphasis on marketing its resources. Conferences, summer schools, sports camps and residential courses were concentrated in times of the year when undergraduates had no taught contact hours. Contracts with external customers could be for continuous or regular events across the whole year. Catering, caretaking and security staff worked over public and university holidays, servicing different customer groups with different requirements, fee levels and standards both concurrently and sequentially. Security and caretaking staff serviced these functions within their usual work hours. For catering staff evening and weekend work could be required outside their usual shift. Additional hours work were offered and volunteered for in a transparent process by postings on notice boards. Cover for absence and vacant posts was provided by colleagues working extra hours, additional tasks or being transferred from another site.

> *get to work at different campuses if they need help* (Catering 2 Notes)

This could mean uncertainty of job or location.

> "it says 30 hours in my contract it doesn't specify what hours I do or what days I do" (Catering 3)

One person described covering a different site because of staffing shortages, a tiring day.

> "I was running about, there was kids on bikes running round, there was Italians, there was you know sort of another group there … and I was on my own, I had to do a disco, somebody break into a building and I was running around ragged" (Security 14)

The roles of catering assistants have become less demarked. At one time there had been set jobs

> "Yeah everyone had their job that they had to do and got it done"
> (Catering 11)

Greater flexibility was now required, with staff being expected to do each others jobs to cover for absent colleagues or respond to service demand.

> *each needs to be able to drop on something and know what you are doing … multitask, cover for someone calls in sick, short notice … know enough of each others' jobs to cover…* coffee *bar, help out in hospitality, counter, delivering teas/coffees, cover breaks* (Catering 10 Notes)

Some change is routine, occurring every year

> "I don't work here, I work in the (building) coffee bar but all the outlets you know are closed in the summer and I'm over here then." (Catering 11)

> "So come back from the holidays in September and there's graduation which is a lovely time here very busy, extra work then makes up for the summer" (Catering 8)

Staff had worked in multiple locations, either on different sites or in different units on the same site

> “I’ve been to (4 site names), this has been my main one like” (Catering 11)

> “in different units but always here” (Catering 3)

> *Went to (name) building and (name) building couple years at a time* (Catering 5 Notes)

> *go to other campuses if needed, move others about more, tend not to (site) unless emergency* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

Whilst there was flexibility of working practice, the staff were physically constrained by the requirement to be in particular places at particular times. For catering staff advertised service times and points were fixed. Security and caretaking staff rotated static and patrolling duties.

> “so we don’t move until someone comes and takes me off “ (Security 14)

> *Fixed + scan cameras. Used to patrol every hour and in the meantime sit and watch the camera.* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

Autonomy was limited, opportunities for short breaks were created in the routine of patrol duty.

> "people smoke, and they can have five minutes for a fag, they can have their fag breaks but we can't have a tea break … I've got a packet with tea, teabags, milk, sugar, so all I need for a drink is hot water … I'll get myself a cup of tea, and I'll patrol walking round with a cup of tea but that's how we get across it … every security guard's got different thing… we all take 10 minutes" (Security 14)

5.3.5 Hierarchy

The work of these staff is subject to several layers of management. Catering managers were rarely mentioned. Such comments as there were placed them as helpful, incidental or absent.

> *Managers approachable, any problems will do their best to help you* (Catering 10 Notes)

> *within 6 months had five different managers* (Catering 5 Notes)

> "had loads of different managers …all kinds umm, they've all been all right …" (Catering 11)

> "managers all right, when they're here (laugh)" (Catering 8)

Catering managers have been observed covering for staff in a variety of tasks.

Security staff observed in work teams in training sessions, showed deference towards supervisors, with an expectation they could be relied on in difficult situations. There was

occasional mention of managers in banter between staff, with unfavourable comment on operational managers not responding to concerns.

> b*oiler at back of (A) goes on at 4.30 a.m. every day and alarm in (B) goes off – reported for a year – not sorted – managers not here at 4.30 - automatic phone on alarm irritation as keeps phoning even when cancelled*
> (Training Observation 4.1 Notes)

Higher level managers, however, appeared more distant and there was some cynicism expressed about the decisions of the most senior management.

> *they are making cuts but can build new buildings*
> (Training Observation 4 Notes)

5.3.6 Training

> *no matter how old you are and how experienced, always got someone to learn from and like that part …* (Catering 2 Notes)

Take-up of mandatory and self-selected training was reported, accessed through the University Staff Development Programme, local colleges, and on-job training. Benefits were identified in specific work requirements, personal interest and the acquisition of skills relevant to future work. Security and caretaking staff did not mention any training other than mandatory. The courses mentioned were skill specific.

> *NVQ2 catering 2 or 3 years ago* (Catering 10 Notes)

> "Yes we do a load of training yeah, there was a computer course, a computer course as well (laugh) it was only a basic six week course, but

they will let us go on it if we need to go on it in the term time" (Catering 8)

Some mandatory training had come about through regulatory requirements.

Manual handling, 1st Aid every 3 years (Caretaking 15)

In couple of weeks time refresher on 1st Aid training and food hygiene so always courses you can go on (Catering 2 Notes)

"1st aid and courses for this and courses for that, never had that before" (Catering 11)

"never had to do temperatures at one time, if it was hot you'd serve it you know" (Catering 11)

Elective training had brought staff into contact with people from across the institution.

Basic sign language course last year … quite a few people from other parts of the University, students, library staff, office staff (Catering10 Notes)

The directory of staff training was published electronically with reminders circulated by e.mail. However, most of the catering staff interviewed did not have e.mail accounts and they seemed to receive periodic invitations to training rather than continuous access to information.

> "We get a booklet from the offices … she comes from the office and then she contacts us, things we want to do" (Catering 8)

> *given a book listing of courses could choose what to do* (Catering 10 Notes)

There was some question whether all staff had equal access to training.

> *Only having new staff on NVQ not longer serving ones* (Caretaking 15)

Questions about training provision not being accessible for part-time shift workers were raised. A catering member of staff suggested that although lack of training used to be an obstacle for manual staff in achieving internal promotion, access had improved.

> *wasn't any staff development before. Now can go on NVQs etc. to back up qualifications so better position when applying e.g. CVs etc. supporting manual staff much better* (Catering 5 Notes)

External training had been funded by the university and by government training schemes.

> *local colleges, can go to for 3 years – done course one night a week at W's college so University paid the fees just had to pay for the equipment.* (Catering 2 Notes)

The observed sessions of security staff training were part of a programme which was centrally funded to NVQ Level 2 and provided by external trainers.

5.3.7 Job Security

A belief was expressed in the permanency of the University providing some protection for its workforce.

> *University good people to work for - more secure in job as education is always going to be there, will always be needed in some way. Unions here and pension schemes, which is supposed to be one of the best which is really good*.
> (Catering 2 Notes)

> "I think it's because urmm you know that it's a safe, well
> safe enough job, well no job's safe now … it's more sort of academic when you work for a uni because they have so much money that is given to them by the government whereas if you work in like a catering company they haven't got that"
> (Catering 3)

A striking omission in conversations with these staff was the financial and employment situation unfolding during the period of data collection. During Freshers' Fair there was a busy, energetic buzz of new students milling around packed halls and courtyard. Meanwhile in an adjacent building there was a meeting considering a redundancy package for staff. On Intake Day, staff were welcoming new and returning students whilst speculating on whether they would qualify for an upcoming voluntary redundancy scheme.

5.4 **Visibility**

Catering, caretaking and security staff were the most visible of staff groups. They were present on all sites, mobile around grounds and buildings and staffing static contact points. They were identifiable as staff by their clothing, with uniforms specific to each occupation. Amidst the busy, peopled, university environment they could be immediately seen. Figure 5.3 depicts the aspects of visibility of the people and their work. Some of their work required visibility to be effective, such as patrolling to act as a deterrent to unwanted behaviour. Other activities were deliberately concealed from the university population. Many formal work activities were highly visible, serving food, checking passes, collecting rubbish, yet so familiar they could be overlooked. These staff were positioned to observe changes in normal functioning of the institution, in turn they were under constant surveillance.

Figure 5.3 – Aspects of Visibility

Visible to All	Intentionally Visible	Watching
Overlooked	Intentionally Hidden	Being Watched

5.4.1 Visible To All

Uniforms identified staff and demarked occupations. Catering assistants in refectories wore blue tabards, those serving in cafes wore black and white uniform to contribute to the coffee bar styling. They wore name badges identifying them individually, which as two staff pointed out, meant people knew their names whether they wanted them to or not. The clothing was of thin material suitable for staff working in heated conditions. Caretakers blue sweatshirts had the least visual impact, suitable for staff moving around the campus unobtrusively, yet needing identification in private areas and on reception desks. Lettering on the uniforms of security and caretaking staff named their role, not the individual. Security staff wore black outer clothing, with an intentional resemblance to police uniforms intended to denote authority and act as a deterrent. This was reinforced by their accessories, radio, ear piece, notebook, carrying belt and torch. Much of their shift was spent outdoors and they could be exposed to danger. Waterproof jackets, stab vests and protective boots gave them a bulky shape. In security training sessions there was teasing between those who prided themselves on the smartness of their uniform and those for whom this was not important. As well as their persons being visible, the work of these staff resulted in conditions noticeable to everyone using a site. Open buildings, clean toilets, absence of graffiti and litter, stocked vending machines, services available all day, every day.

5.4.2 Overlooked

There is a paradox in the visibility of this work in that the better it is done, the less it is noticed. It was striking that the university sites were tidy and free of graffiti or litter. This contribution to the environment in which all activities occurred could be taken for granted. Staff in other occupations spoke of coming to work thinking of what they had to do, the place they did it was familiar and no longer noticed unless something went wrong. Continual low-profile interactions between catering, caretaking and security staff and the rest of the

university population were occurring everywhere, all the time. They were a constant feature of daily activity so could go unremarked. The individual wearing the uniform could also be overlooked, with only their role being noticed.

> "I don't think the students see us I don't think they realise
> that we are there to keep them safe (Security 14)

Catering staff described people talking on their mobile phones or to friends while being served food and not acknowledging the person serving them.

> *Get taken for granted – when you work with the students, work on the till. – I say please or thank you – make the point … it's when a group walk out and not one will say anything* (Catering 9 Notes)

5.4.3 Intentionally Visible

The visible presence of security staff is deliberately deployed to deter potential intruders.

> "at (site) all you do is patrol because they have break-ins ... they have people visiting, they have hikers and bikers they have everything there, so you're just a presence there like you know umm … it's the presence being there, they see you as an authority … if there's security on there then people change … people start thinking differently" (Security 14)

> *Providing escorts to valuables, staff and VIPs, escorting women on car park*
> (Training Observation 2 Notes)

Staff being visible is helpful to people in emergencies, identifying who to look to for help and guidance. This aspect of their work is discussed further in Chapter 6.

5.4.4 Intentionally Hidden

Other aspects of work are deliberately unobtrusive

> "we don't want to show you, you know, us dashing round sorting out problems, somebody fighting … it won't exactly help the university reputation to see people fighting, people fighting all the time and disruptive and all that you know and that's why we're employed to sort out all these problems" (Security 14)

As well as threats to the individual, there are wider dangers. Staff worked with external agencies to prepare for serious incidents such as explosions, floods and epidemic illness.

5.4.5 Watching

These staff were positioned to know what was usual and seemed to function as the eyes, ears and nose of the university, being alert for hazards, intruders and anything untoward.

> *One member of staff called a colleague over, having smelled something unusual outside – both smelled – said better check it out, one left to do so* (Observation Notes)

> *Looking/listening/smelling – fire, breaking glass*
> (Training Observation 1.2 Notes)

> *what looking for changes in behaviour* (Training Observation 2.1 Notes)

The portable property on university sites can be attractive to thieves, requiring vigilance from staff.

> "we get people who just come in off the street and just nick stuff, that's their, that's their whole game in life is just to come in ... they're really cocky and they walk in with the students with four or five students, and get amongst them and they distract you or you know and they get in or they know where you are so ... they goes to the back doors and then, yep it's a regular game, you know what I mean, it's a regular occurrence here" (Security 14)

This means a constant watchfulness and alert observation for deliberate attempts to conceal identity.

> *We do watch people and approach them* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

> "You can never switch off with the job, you never switch off because you're looking at people all the time" (Security 14)

> "Oh yeah, you get to know, he wasn't nobody ordinary looking man …. he'd changed his head and shaved his beard" (Catering 8)

All sites were covered by scanning and static cameras to allow staff to watch premises and people. The camera control rooms were staffed by security and caretaking personnel, the colleagues of those on duty. This played an important role in providing protection and calling in back-up for staff dealing with incidents. However, this was partly illusory as the function was continuously staffed on only one site.

(site) *not staffed full-time so CCTV mainly reactive rather than monitoring – only staffed if someone free - Illusion of CCTV that being monitored. So staff may be more at risk than (site) in some ways.*
(Training Observation 4.1 Notes)

5.4.6 Being Watched

These staff were subject to constant surveillance. They were observed at their work stations by colleagues and by people with predatory intent. Cameras may have been deployed to maximise staff protection and the prevention of crime but they put staff under constant observation.

"They watch yr don't they the con man watches … went on my break he came in, they're not stupid are they very clever, very clever" (Catering 8)

"you're being watched all the time it's 24/7…There's a camera up there, he can see me up there … so there's a camera on the door and there's a camera behind me so all the university is pretty much covered with cameras … every building's got their own cameras … there's one that pans outside in the car park stuff like that you know … primarily on the reception somewhere like that you know so um it's to protect, protect the receptionist" (Security 14)

These highly visible, and possibly overlooked, staff navigated a university workplace that was a complex social institution with tens of thousands of people coming together for different reasons to perform different functions at different times. They described a varied University population. Alongside the students and staff there were conference delegates, summer school pupils, visitors, customers, suppliers, construction workers, delivery personnel, local children, dog walkers, people seeking shelter and others bent on theft. All these people gathered on the five sites in three towns of the university estate. The formal

work activities of catering, security and caretaking staff enabled the University to operate. By working shifts they, collectively, maintained a presence on all sites at all times. They provided food, accommodation and security, dealing with the detritus produced by people gathering together. They staffed the social spaces important to students' formal and informal learning. This work was closely structured as to time, place and task. Staff were subject to surveillance from the university population, colleagues and intruders. They could be deployed where required at short notice, working different shifts when directed. For some staff this flexibility was reflected in fixed term contracts with no security of renewal. The lowest paid staff in the university, these people had considerable responsibility for the health and safety of the population. This Chapter has focussed on their perspectives of the structural arrangements of their work. The approach they brought to this work and to the social interactions within it, are considered in the following Chapter.

Chapter 6 – Perception of the Job and Interactions with Students

The previous Chapter addressed structural aspects of the workplace and the functions of catering, caretaking and security staff. The focus of this Chapter is the individuals who undertook the work and the relationships that they had to their jobs and the social encounters occurring in their work. Given the complex nature of the experience of work the ethnographic approach that has been used inevitably gave rise to a multiplicity of possible themes. The focus here has been to select the two that are central in terms of this thesis. The Chapter is in two sections. The first is concerned with peoples' attitudes to their work. The second section considers their approach to encounters with the 20,000 plus students who made up the majority of the university population.

6.1 Attitude towards the Job

Low paid jobs with low hierarchical status are often viewed negatively by people in higher status occupations. But peoples' own comments on their jobs and the place of work in their lives suggest that they experience a complexity of roles that may not be appreciated. They may also deploy considerable social and emotional capacity in undertaking their work.

People commented on their jobs and the place of work in their lives. In this densely populated workplace, variety of social contact was seen as providing interest and enjoyment. However, there were also encounters that were difficult and sometimes dangerous. These were approached with intent to defuse and manage emotion and behaviour. Self management and co-operation were deployed to maintain safety.

6.1.1 A Job

Comments on current jobs expressed overall satisfaction tempered by reservations and approached pragmatically.

> *It's fine most of the time, obviously everybody has a little glip now and then*" (Catering 12)

People expressed enjoyment and reservations

> "I've enjoyed working here anyway" (Catering 11)

> "I love it, (laughs) I really enjoy it" (Catering 8)

> "I can't lie and say it's all good because there are bad days" (Catering 4)

> *all right, quite enjoy it, everybody gets those times with a job, fed-up, but fine* (Catering 9)

Work could be seen as boring, irritating and tiring.

> "this time of year it's boring … it's a bit quiet I just feel a bit down like" (Catering 8)

> "in September this is absolutely packed you know … but err now quiet, now really quiet, bit boring" (Security 14)

> *thinks there is too much red tape working for an organisation such as the University… Being an organisation this large obviously things have got to be*

done by the book. Whereas worked other places where it doesn't matter (Catering 12 Notes)

"had a few days when … really, really busy and got no staff and really tired but you go home and you forget it you know"
(Catering 11)

Comments indicated a practical acknowledgement of the need for work with an appreciation of social interactions with colleagues.

"lucky to have a job" (Catering 8)

"It can be hard in ways but at the end of the day I've got a job" (Catering 3)

I'm here because I need the money if you're really honest everybody is but you have to come to work … it's good, clean here and we all get on together (Catering 4)

social thing – all here do job for money, need work (Catering 9 Notes)

6.1.2 It Suited Me

Such pragmatism did not, however, mean that people saw their choices as being completely constrained. The importance of work fitting in with family life was raised by catering staff, with the academic year and working hours being attractive.

Got family, took job because of the breaks it suited me and carried on suiting me. (Catering 6 Notes)

Had daughter so change in job, change in income, child care not good, home life more important so not thinking ahead. (Catering 5 Notes)

Before come here worked at pubs, banqueting, hotels, split shift + 6 days a week, here 8.00-4.00, 5 days so better for family life. (Catering 2 Notes)

This balance could change over time

Ideal when children were small but now grown up could do more hours. (Catering 10 Notes)

Summer fine off with the kids, now prefer the money for more hours (Catering 9 Notes)

Time of life was raised, along with the desire for an active working day. One security officer considered the walking to be the best part of security work. Mobility brought variety.

ideal job for someone winding down, not hard physical work ... towards end of working life but feels doing a useful job (Caretaking 15 Notes)

don't have to sit behind a desk or machine all day can move around (Caretaking 15 Notes)

6.1.3 No Day Is The Same

Flexible working was required of these staff who could be deployed on tasks or sites different to those expected. For some this was seen as part of the daily norm. The variety of task could be pleasing and approached in a pragmatic way.

> "every day there are complications you can't say that every day is the same"
> (Catering 4)

> *job varied - not same things every day - good if active person*
> (Catering 1 Notes)

> *Never really quiet, always something comes up – things come in.*
> (Catering 9 Notes)

> *Nice to be able to float round - just the change*. (Catering 9 Notes)

> *As long as I know what I am doing and expected to do then I'll give it a go*.
> (Catering 5 Notes)

In their varied work locations and activities, security, caretaking and catering staff had frequent interactions with the full range of people using University premises. They have spoken of students, staff, visitors, external customers, local residents and intruders. On duty at entrances security staff encountered everyone coming in and going out. Staff roamed the grounds and buildings they encountered people continuously, including those attempting to evade them. People came regularly to the workstations of static staff.

Security staff were responsible for restricting access to university premises. Details of people they wish to exclude or who aroused suspicion were circulated, descriptions and images were posted on notice boards. However, the university sites were in populated

areas, had extensive grounds and open access points. Staff therefore encountered people unconnected to the university using the facilities.

> "*can't stop me using the Uni – public building*"
> (Training Observation 3.2)

> "*nipping in to use the toilet*" (Training Observation 1.1)

A duty to exclude unauthorised people was balanced by a kindly attitude to people on the premises.

> *Local drug users coming onto Campus, people sleeping rough – again care and kindness demonstrated, some distaste at physical detritus and state of one individual. Discussion about how people can get into such a bad way and experiences exchanged – agreed to encouraging people to leave premises rather than harsh eviction* (Training Observation 2.1 Notes)

Although people could be difficult, there was an attitude of care towards the university population. There was a sense of the place being theirs and hospitality being offered.

> "*when they are on our campus they are in our care*"
> (Training Observation 1.2 Notes)

> *Take care of while in building, whoever they are*
> (Training Observation1.1 Notes)

> "*our students*" (Catering 11)

"that's the idea, you know, the idea is to keep safe, the students safe" (Security 14)

6.2 **Lovely, Grumpy, Nasty**

Most interactions were seen as pleasing although there were frequent encounters with behaviour perceived as difficult, rude and aggressive. Participants had a sociable attitude towards the people around them.

"I like people" (Catering 8)

I love being around people and different people (Caretaking 15 Notes)

"Me I'm a fairly friendly person so anyone who wants to come and talk to me can talk to me." (Security 14)

"I've always got on with everybody" (Catering 11)

"I love catering, I love being out the front mixing with people talking to the customers." (Catering 4)

Social interactions brought interest and variety to the job.

"it's a mixture of people, I think that's why I find it interesting, it's different people every day " (Catering 8)

"The thing I would say, dealing with people all day long, it's a variety job, you don't know what you're doing next sort of thing. It's really good, yeah." (Security 14)

Regularity of contact allowed people to get to know each other, with staff indicating a sensitivity of interaction.

> *Get to know the staff because here and about … and they get to know you. Some chat to more than others and some will make you a cup of coffee in their offices.* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

> *Serving them every day – get on first name terms, on the whole everybody is friendly* (Catering 10 Notes)

> *do meet a load of customers – become friends* (Catering 10 Notes)

> "You get to know the faces, and some people are really friendly ... you talk to them, but other people are distant so you have to choose if they want to speak to you … we do make a lot of friends we do you know, I mean there's an Indian girl here she's invited me to her wedding you know so you do make friends but it's got to come from them you know what I mean"
> (Security 14)

Courtesy was appreciated.

> *I do like it when they say thank you … When you are trying to do a job and get it right, nice to get it back*. (Catering 9 Notes)

> "you're appreciated and shows your doing the job right" (Catering 8)

Not all encounters were pleasing, staff were exposed to difficult behaviour.

> "we've got some really nice people but we've got people that have their problems, we have some really nasty ones, not lovely and that's part and parcel of anybody's job." (Catering 4)

> "Sometimes, you get some funny people though, only a few times throughout the years but they haven't been very nice" (Catering 8)

> "Like if someone is abusive here you always remember them because they leave a mark on you" (Security 14)

This behaviour was pro-actively managed by staff.

> *Get to know customers and will get to know ones that will kick off, so serve perfectly so they are happy. Some will try on – just be extra nice to them so they move on.* (Catering 10 Notes)

> "Just get them laughing" (Security 14)

An understanding that whether a situation was defused or escalated could impact on colleagues throughout the day was described.

> *incident at the beginning of the day with man angry at something that had happened at the car park – was unpleasant to security staff who asked for his pass – security wanted to be aggressive back but instead calmed him down and managed him – aware that if he responded how he would have liked to, it would have angered the man even more and affected others*
> (Training Observation 2.2)

Catering staff relied on senior colleagues to assist them.

> *Will get grumpy customers, would get line manager to do it* (Catering 10 Notes)

> "we're told just walk away, you get some who, you know - you work here you do what I say - but head chef dealt with him and he didn't come back again" (Catering 8)

There were different expectations of staff in problematic encounters described. Catering staff could step away from trouble, security staff were required to step towards it and caretakers could happen on it at any time. On occasion staff had to deal with incidents of aggression and violence which put them in danger.

6.2.1 Confrontations

The level of danger could be unclear, with staff being exposed to weapons and unpredictable people. Training for security staff covered dealing with such situations but caretakers did not receive this nor have protective clothing. There seemed to be intuitive understandings of how to manage disturbed people with a possibility of incidents escalating.

> "we've just all been measured for body armour … because the confrontations we've been having lately" (Security 14)

There may be verbal abuse,

> "he was shouting abuse and he was really, really vile verbally … shout if you want, scream if you want that's nothing, I ain't worried if he ain't hitting anybody, if he's shouting" (Security 14)

one drug addict looking for open door/window, pinched a laptop – radioed and caught him, phoned police … getting agitated got full hypodermic - get out of my way and jumped out of the window – ran – police coming saw him and got him. (Caretaking15 Notes)

"a bloke had a Stanley knife and he ain't got no ID or anything … we had to have six or seven guys to try and get him out … he'd got a Stanley knife and um it was horrendous like you know, but we managed to get him out and the police took him up again" (Security 14)

"I'm thinking hold on has he got a gun or a knife what's he got" (Security 14)

Deliberate emotional management was deployed to reduce tension, responding to aggression with calmness and courtesy were described.

Use discretion/speak to them properly even if aggressive speak to them how you would like to be spoken to yourself. (Caretaking15 Notes)

"but the idea is to talk them down, not confrontation he's got problems, you know he's got problems, so say straightaway OK you've got problems" (Security 14)

6.2.2 Back-Up

For serious situations there were formal procedures in place. Deployed staff maintained radio contact with colleagues in control rooms who could call in help when necessary

"If they call (alarm code) that means everybody has to go, there's an incident somewhere …everything's is stopped, all the airways are clear … so we've always got backing, we've always got cover" (Security14)

Staff relied on each other for back-up in dealing with difficult and dangerous situations. Loyalty between team members was seen as especially important by security staff.

> "we've all got teams, we're in a team, I'm in a team, a team of four and we back our team to the hilt … and the other team will do the same for their team and that's how we work and we're as close as we can be you know … we all back one another up, cause we know it could be us you know next time we all say it could be us" (Security 14)

One reported incident illustrated this co-operation. A caretaker was assaulted when he went to help a woman being attacked. This was recorded by camera, control room staff radioed the nearest security staff who immediately provided back-up. Colleagues in the control room monitored developments, a supervisor was sent to the scene and the police were called. The caretaker was effectively protected, the attacker was contained until the police arrived. No staff were seriously injured but were detrimentally affected by the incident.

6.2.3 Can't Loose Cool

Incidents evoked different emotional responses. One group of security staff described the adrenalin rush when responding to incidents and emergencies. This could be exciting and arousing, yet they needed to manage their own behaviour and that of other people. Team members helped to restrain each other if necessary (Training Observation 4.2).

There was a contrast between routine and the unexpected.

> "Anything can happen within split seconds in this place ... you just don't know what's going to happen and urr you just have to be prepared for it. Everyday is a different situation, I mean you at times it's boring and

> everything else but the 10% you do get something, the adrenaline goes and anything's happening and you've just got to be there" (Security 14)

This was accompanied by the knowledge that in times of emergency people would look to security staff for help and reassurance. It was their responsibility when dealing with difficult people in difficult situations to be the one that retained emotional control.

> "step back for a few seconds, step back away from the situation, if something's happening and you run to err, you run to an incident just step back two seconds … look around you, you know" (Security 14)

> *Expectation of everyone that security will know*
> (Training Observation 1.2 Notes)

> *importance of maintaining control over own emotional state in order to reassure others. Difficult to do when just as affected by emotion and adrenal response as everybody else, use of training and reflecting on each incident to strengthen response in future.* (Training Observation 1.1 Notes)

> *Arguing with people time consuming but can't loose cool*
> (Training Observation 3.2 Notes)

The capacity to do this may vary and be affected by external factors.

> "I can handle confrontation, sometimes I don't handle it very well because I'm upset, I'm having a bad day, so I may have been late, had a row with the missus or something like that and somebody comes at me and gives me a really hard time, it's different. Everybody is different, and everybody's can handle it different" (Security 14)

Security and caretaking staff are of low hierarchal status but are expected to take control in times of emergency. They are instructed to treat all alarms as if the emergency is real, not a drill. Other people may approach alarms with more complacency.

> *Both staff and students not co-operative in drills/alarms. Most false alarms and students and staff know that, feel safe and want to carry on as before.* (Training Observation 3.2 Notes)

Frustration was expressed at a lack of co-operation. On occasion more senior staff refused to accept security staff directions and people argued with them.

> "…. you have got to get people out of here no matter what, you've got to stop people coming in. You get people wanting to go back in, I've got to get me ... I've got to get this, no chance …you ain't getting back in, and you can explain to them it's your safety if you go back in there it could be an explosion, it could be a bomb could be anything" (Security 14)

In one evacuation someone argued and then pushed past a security officer on duty.

> *He ignored security advice and went where he wanted, leaving Security Officer frustrated* (Training Observation 3.2 Notes)

A different argument reported, resulted in anger and a loss of control.

> *discussion of incident where someone had left their laptop in the library on evacuation at a fire alarm. On being refused entry they had become insistent security officer distracted from emergency procedures, could not stand and argue it out – hindered from job - told them they could be first back in when all clear but not before. Concerned as to whether handled all right because lost control sufficiently to shout attracting attention from people*

passing – made the point that it may be a drill but it may be real and security staff do not know which – so lives could be endangered when dealing with someone who is only concerned about their own situation.

(Training Observation1.1 Notes)

These staff members described a pragmatic approach to work, mobility and variety were valued. A variety of social encounters provided interest although some were difficult and dangerous requiring self control and management of other peoples' behaviour. The majority of the university population over most of the year, was students. Interactions with students dominated interviews, informal conversations and observations. These are considered in the second part of this Chapter.

6.3 **Interactions with Students**

Encounters between catering, caretaking and security staff with students could be regular, occasional or unexpected. They could occur during times of academic tension, personal crisis and institutional emergency, as well as times of relaxation and celebration. Interactions with students were generally seen as pleasing although there were incidents of aggression and frequent encounters with difficult behaviour. Three categories of relationship have been identified, customer service, containment and companionship. Customer service engaged a pragmatic attitude, a steady stream of students signalling job security. Containment concerned the need to manage the problematic behaviour of some students, seen as aggravating, aggressive and abusive. Companionship concerned pleasing encounters invoking affection, liking, interest and fun.

6.3.1 Customer Service

"Well I always say, if you've no students - they're our bread and butter aren't they, they're our job, so you've got to look after them" (Catering 11)

A helpful approach to students was seen by staff as important to the university's reputation, student recruitment and consequently job security. They appreciated the importance of students as customers

> "we want, the University wants ... the people to come and if we can get people to come here we've done our job" (Catering 4)

They were pro-active in setting standards of customer service.

> "somebody's left their bag, he's left his wallet, he's left his ID, he's gone home ... now one of our security guards … he's e.mailed him and says we've got your wallet, we've got your ID come and claim it …. now to me that's the way it should work, it should work like that" (Security 14)

> "if they enjoyed coming and you could get the same standard, good standard whichever Campus, every department… they might actually want to come to the university. At the end of the day we need the students and they are the base of our customers, beside lecturers but they're kinda here anyway because it's their job" (Catering 4)

One person described customer service training in previous jobs in high street shops and its relevance to her current job.

> *Principles never change in customer service industry … all about the products, how to speak to them, cleanliness, safety, risk, all those aspects. Now put to other uses so grounding stayed there, built in.* (Catering 5 Notes)

Security staff referred to past experience in other jobs in the police and armed forces, hospital and shopping centre security. There was discussion about the different cultures of these working environments and the customer care approach expected in the University.

It has already been noted that staff might have to deal with difficult encounters. This can create a tension between a customer and containment role when managing encounters with students.

6.3.2 Containment

This tension is particularly apparent for security staff balancing customer service with the need to contain difficult behaviour. This was made explicit in the job description for a security supervisor.

> "This is a front line customer focus role, but on occasions the post holder may require to adopt an assertive approach whilst at all times acting in a professional and courteous manner in representing the University."

and the comment of one staff member

> *95% of the time here to help you - 5% here to deal with you*
>
> (Security Training 1.1 Notes)

The university management would seem to have emphasised their containment role in the uniforms. Their appearance deliberately places the emphasis on control rather than care.

> *discussion re presence/clothing of security staff, type of clothing/uniform at other Universities – (university name) staff wear suits because of concerns about how students, particularly international students from some countries, would perceive men in quasi police/forces style uniforms. Alternative view of perceived safer to have visible security staff, one member of staff having accompanied child to an Open Day and been disturbed by absence of visible staff.* (Training Observation 1.1 Notes)

Relationships with students could sometimes be difficult. They could be perceived as rude and annoying with some behaviour becoming aggressive.

> *Students can be rude, everyone finds it gets to them sometimes, don't always manage to keep cool* (Training Observation 2.3 Notes)

They were also referred to as:

> *arsey* (Training Observation 2 Notes)
> *disruptive* (Training Observation 1.1 Notes)
> *aggravating* (Training Observation 2.2 Notes)

With recognition that these were in the minority.

> *5-10% but can affect perception of whole body*
> (Training Observation 2.2 Notes)

Student dissatisfaction with the University could be directed at security staff. The visibility of these staff and security staff in particular, meant that while they were a source of information and help, student dissatisfaction with the University could be directed at them simply because they were there.

> *Have a go at security staff about all sorts of things e.g. lecturer late or lecture cancelled – because they are there* (Training Observation 4.1 Notes)

Or students could just be difficult for reasons discernable only to themselves.

> *Students try to punch/use radio - students trying to grab her radio to try it out – had happened several times* (Training Observation 4.2 Notes)

> *students trying to wind-up security staff to get them to hit them, so they can have a go claiming self-defense and get it caught on camera. Security walked away and had students later apologise*
> (Training Observation 4.1 Notes)

The university could take action to protect staff from abusive students although there was perceived inequity in the system.

> "there's a protocol where you report it to the supervisor, the
> supervisor will come and talk to the person and get his ID off his card, report it to his head and say you know he's been really disruptive. He'll probably get a warning, a written warning and the next time it happens he's automatically sent down. So it depends you know how much, how much he's done, if he hits somebody it's automatically sent down, if its verbal it's usually a warning and to calm down" (Security14)

If student complains of security staff, get called to office and carpeted – If student nothing – don't know if taken up

(Training Observation 2.3 Notes)

6.3.3 Be Understanding

There was some tolerance and understanding for the awkward behaviour of students with recognition of structural tensions and celebrations. The emotional content of such times could be troublesome. Assignment deadlines were known to create tensions with extra security staff being deployed outside Student Offices.

"you do get the odd stroppy, really bad student and eh you know ... it just flares up and goes down, flares up and goes down, it's like that he's had a bad day, you don't know what's happened to him in his house, he's come out his missus had a row with him so he's come here, the first one he's looking at is you, takes it out on you" (Security 14)

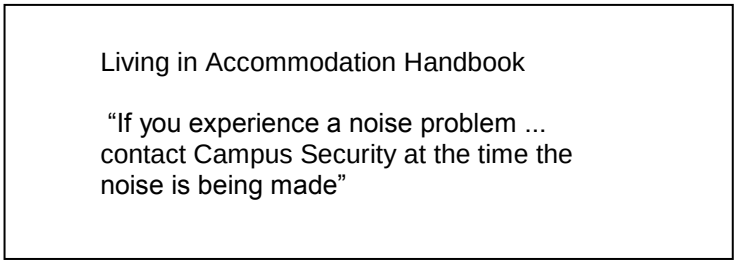
worst time when they have to get assignments in - loads of hassle - confrontations 4.00 it closes. Push past to get in cry, scream, kick, shout

(Security 14 Notes)

Examination weeks could be tense, and distressing. Catering staff reduced suppliers' orders before and during exam weeks because anxious students ate less.

> *cut a bit of slack, if come to reception and a bit edgy – bit stressed - but might have been up all night revising so have to be understanding at that time of the year as well …coming up to exams did see that girl sitting outside crying hysterically took her into reception – trying to build herself up to going into exam* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

Particular difficulties arose in halls of residence. The variety of course provision and students created tensions over different needs for sleep. One person described a tension on one site between students wanting to party, and nursing students having to get up at 6.00 for their ward placements. On residential sites staff and students often clashed over noise and fights. Staff were placed as mediators between conflicting priorities and were called on for help. Although both security and caretaking staff were expected to respond to incidents, only security staff had protective clothing.



They assessed incidents and used discretion between a pragmatic response and university policy. The requirement on residential students is to limit noisy activity, with penalties for non-compliance.

> License Agreement paragraph 4.11
>
> **"**ensure that all noise is kept to a reasonable level between 11:00 p.m. and 8:00 a.m."

The reality is,

> *Music loud and others complain, knock on door - some staff abrasive in tone I don't have that approach – 9 times out of 10 that will work and they'll respond to it* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

> *Spanish students one semester a year – guitars - don't sleep 3 am partying outside guitars/dancing want to involve them (staff on duty)*
> (Catering 15 Notes)

More dangerous incidents also required pragmatic assessment.

> *Try and break up arguments 9 times out of 10 a girl involved. Girl attacking car, seen on camera with axe ... Talk people down* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

> *Situation – girl, 2 lads dragging her into hostel and rushed down 3 of us with radio – you can imagine what we were thinking, found she had gone to sort out girl (who was now dating ex-boyfriend) and lads were dragging her back into her block* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

After exams water fights – let them get on with it and use discretion as long as not doing damage." (Caretaking 15 Notes)

6.3.4 Time and Time Again

Numerous aggravating encounters took place with students who had forgotten things, misplaced things or had things stolen from them. Some careless behaviour was a source of constant irritation, as were attempts to deceive staff who had heard it all before.

Lockouts – claim left key in room to avoid fee (Training Observation 4 Notes)

The most frequent interactions between security staff and students were when checking identity cards. If students had forgotten their card they were denied access, which happened often

IDs"you've just got to talk em down and try and do your best to say look, you know, if I can help yrr, I can help yrr but if you've got no ID you can't come in, you know you just explain, if you explain to them, they're OK 90% of them ... you've got to try and defuse it, defuse the situation" (Security 14)

Observing security staff checking passes, there were many occasions where banter was used to defuse aggressive situations.

Peoples' personal possessions were not always guarded adequately by their owners. A description of a previous theft of a laptop from a library shows the difficulties.

> And I've told um, time and time again, don't leave your laptop, don't leave your phone, don't leave your wallet, don't leave your bag on the floor … he's walked away from it for half an hour, a bloke's come up, picked it up and walked out. Now you might not be able to see that bloke again it's an opportunist thief. He's sneaked in with somebody else, he's walked in with somebody else, he knows what the procedures are … so he'll sit at a desk and he'll wait and he'll look round. (Security 14)

Careless behaviour could result in more serious incidents. Kitchen fires in halls of residence were raised by different staff, they caused work if minor and danger if substantial.

> *Fire alarms from cooking, e.g. sausages, smoke and evacuate building* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

> *girls put on chips and came up to Learning Centre, kitchen fire, fire engines – kitchen completely destroyed* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

Uncooperative behaviour could put people in danger but it also endangered the staff employed to protect them. The tension between aggravation and amusement is illustrated by two incidents with sleepy students and fire alarms.

> *Fire alarms – 9am, few people came out, had to go room to room to get people out of bed* (Training Observation 1.2 Notes)

> *Laughter at anecdote re student calling security to ask for alarm to be turned off as ringing for half an hour and keeping him awake*
> (Training Observation 1.2 Notes)

These interactions with students being perceived as both customers and people to be managed are allied to the perception of a more companionable role.

6.4 Companionship

> "They come in September and they get to be your friends and you just get to know them and it's like you've always known them" (Catering 11)

Encounters with students were reported within an overall approach of friendly interest with some affection.

> *Most students nice* (Catering 9 Notes)

> "Yeah I love the students" (Catering 11)

> "I like meeting all the students, different ages and cultures and that's really nice" (Catering 8)

> *I enjoy the involvement of work here with students, all nationalities* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

Staff reported relationships with students built over time, through the contact occasioned by their work. Their connection with students was determined by practicalities, such as time and place of attendance and where meals were eaten, rather than course, module or administrative activity. This allowed contact to be continuous across the several years a student was at the University.

6.4.1 First Contact

Catering provision on Open Days meant these staff could be amongst the first to meet prospective students and visitors.

> "there's all the Open Days going on in different departments within the uni… So it's like … sometimes that's our first come into contact with some people." (Catering 4)

For residential students first contact could be their arrival at the halls of residence. One caretaker expressed pleasure in these early encounters with new arrivals.

> *I love that part of my job I like helping people to settle in… love doing what I've been doing this afternoon, this weekend when new students arrive, they need somebody … try to help them feel at ease*" (Caretaker 15 Notes)

Observations offered glimpses of caretakers helping newcomers manage the complexity of arriving and orientating themselves. They staffed a reception desk which was the only open contact point. Arriving in an unfamiliar environment, students required a range of information which they were offered, repetitively, with patience. Questions to caretakers were about how things worked, where things were and what to do. Examples from notes are:

> *Halls how organised? How kitchen works? Laundry? How locks/security works? Bus pass – how apply? Student ID cards – where get? Phone top-up – where? where is bus station and Uni stand? shops – where, kind of shops, when open, 10-4 on a Sunday, explained what other students do for their shopping. Shuttle Bus – gave time table. Town centre, maps, specific directions.*

A kindly attitude was apparent in helping students who seemed anxious, reassurance was offered.

> *don't worry it will all come in time … you'll soon find yourself around*
> (Caretaker 15 Notes)

> *will explain it to you*
> *if you come back to us we're always here*
> *Key not working, smiling, laugh together*
> *Put guys on ground floor (security), Girls above, Same sex corridors,*
> (Intake Day Observation Notes)

No academic or learner support staff were present, caretakers responded to questions about courses, reassuring students they would get information at School induction sessions in the following week. One student was unsure about attending and was encouraged to do so.

> *Freshers' week, is it compulsory? what is useful? what you don't need to go to?- Caretaker - start off with the induction and then decide* (Intake Day Observation Notes)

Some encounters with anxious students took time to calm them enough to be able to take in information.

> *Caretaker showing student round, refectory/Costa, chatting quietly, where post is put when it arrives, refectory when open, took into Learning Centre, showed leaflets of places, gave rubbish bags, walked over to block giving company* (Intake Day Observation Notes)

person come to desk, wasn't sure where to go the next day for School induction, staff explained where to go, bus to get there, that ID card normally used to access bus but would not get it till induction, so to come to them for temporary pass. (Intake Day Observation Notes)

Caretaker returning to desk - Went to do alarm found girl lost down there completely lost, completely disorientated, walked round with her, showed her round took her to the shop. (Intake Day Observation Notes)

This helpful and friendly welcome contrasted to the general atmosphere of the site. Few people were around, food and drink was only available from vending machines. An induction talk for new students was essentially a list of prohibitions and sanctions. Low residential occupancy on this site meant only twelve new students were expected to check in that day, only about 30 students overall that weekend. This was compared to the excitement of previous times.

Intake day 9 years ago, whole place heaving with parents and used to have sandwiches, refectory open, as families came with them. Got out Students' Union canopy in courtyards with music playing. Buzz comes over to you. (Caretaking 15)

All new students were expected to attend Welcome Week, a very busy time. They received a booklet which was overwhelmingly task orientated. Interspersed with reassuring messages and advice to ensure some quiet times, it was basically a list of instructions. Students needed to find the right place at the right time, taking the right things.

List compiled from Welcome to the University booklet (2009)

- *Check in at accommodation with appropriate paperwork at specified time.*
- *Attend accommodation induction talk.*
- *Enroll in person - specified day - specified place – with stated paperwork.*
- *Attend academic school induction on correct day including finding rooms, meeting academic and administrative staff, attending lectures and events.*

There were administrative tasks to accomplish.

- *Be issued with student card.*
- *Register for IT account.*
- *Register for modules electronically.*
- *Register with doctor.*
- *Open Bank Account if not got one – for which university letter needed.*
- *Deal with any problems in grants, loans, bursaries, fees.*
- *Get TV license.*
- *Get Student Union card.*
- *Find out about part-time work opportunities if wanted.*
- *Get student membership of sports facilities and student sports card.*

Orientation within an unfamiliar environment had to be fast.

- *Locate – student office, school office, personal tutor's office, learning centre, lecture rooms for following week.*
- *How building identification and room numbering on sites works.*
- *Learning Centre tours.*
- *Find bus stops, bus timetable, local transport - get student travel card.*
- *Find where to buy food, drink and other essentials.*

On top of all this international students must manage:

- *international student induction.*
- *qualification and identity checks.*
- *english tests at specific times in specific places.*
- *finding out about working in the UK.*
- *registering with the police (a requirement for some).*

For this one week, extra help was offered.

Welcome to the University booklet (2009)

"If at any time you're feeling lost – or if indeed you actually are lost! – then visit the Welcome Point, any Student Office, the Students' Union, or grab hold of one of the many different Welcome Week helpers and guides."

The emotions of this time were recognised by the university.

> Thoughts on being new to the University – leaflet (2008)
>
> "feelings such as anxiety, excitement, fear, joy, disappointment, loss of control, anger, frustration, exhilaration, and many more can surface."

No mention was made of the catering, caretaking and security staff. Yet they wore uniforms, people could see them, recognise them as university staff and find them easily when they needed help. They were present on all sites and interacted with students throughout the week. On the day of Freshers' Fair, the university security service did not have a stall. The Police did, giving out information on personal and property protection. This was of concern to security staff who had initiated a presence in one year but had not been asked to repeat it.

> *Function of security not well communicated to university population. One staff member had got managerial agreement to staffing a stall at Freshers Fair and to giving a talk on check in day to new students – this had not been repeated* (Training Observation 1.1)

This initiative was seen by a colleague as having been useful in attempting to establish a helpful working relationship between themselves and students.

> "One of the blokes does a talk saying look we're here to help you, we're not here to do anything else, that's our job, if you get lost, if you have problems with someone's bullying yrr or somebody's stealing stuff off yrr, we're here to help you know what I mean … really good because it takes down that barrier because if people come from another country, authority to them is taboo you know what I mean and it just breaks down that barrier then they can come up to us and they can talk to us and that's what he does, it's really good actually. When I found out about that I was dead chuffed about that" (Security 14)

The omission of catering, caretaking and security staff seems unhelpful as they formed the most visible of staff groups available to help students. After the bustle of Welcome Week the extra formal help, was withdrawn, these staff remained accessible, within a physically restricted environment.

Walking around the university buildings the divide between public and private was clear. There were long corridors interspersed with locked doors to offices, staffrooms and storage areas. Areas were secured with keys, key pads and electronic locks. Control over these devices was centralised with access permitted only to selected staff. Teaching rooms, classrooms, laboratories and workshops were locked until needed for timetabled activities. A caretaker said he was only allowed to unlock a classroom three minutes before it was booked, any earlier and security staff would lock it again.

Students had the use of sports, student support and library facilities for specified hours, accessed with their Identity Cards. The least restricted areas were grounds, courtyards, lobbies, refectories and coffee bars. These were the places where security, caretaking and catering staff worked. They did not have offices, their only private areas were the control

rooms for security and caretaking staff and the kitchens for catering staff. These areas were not available for individually initiated retreat, only for sequential rotated activities. Sharing the same terrain as students, the possibilities for impromptu encounters were ever present. These staff were sought out for information, support, reporting problems and asking for help. In these interactions staff could be asked questions, many, many, questions.

6.4.2 They Ask .....

Arriving at the university students had to navigate a large and dispersed estate. Practical information and help to orientate themselves was required. During observation of security staff on duty it was apparent that providing directions and general information was a constant part of their work as uniformed, mobile staff. Security and caretaking staff also provided information when staffing reception desks.

Catering staff reported a wide range of requests for information, particularly when new students arrived.

> *How to turn on computers? where do you print work off? loosing phones, memory sticks, car keys. Where is a room? where are buildings? where go to top up their phone? general every day things. How to use the lift?* (Catering 10 Notes)

Students going into outlets with site maps trying to find their way round were offered directions and reassurance.

> "everyday, everyday, yeah … they ask where different rooms are, where I work… So they ask for directions"
> (Catering 11)

If you can't find it, come back and perhaps take you over and find what you are looking for. (Catering 10 Notes)

Many catering, caretaking and security staff lived locally, they and their families used local facilities and passed on this knowledge to students.

"we've got visitors and where can we go for a treat kind of thing, and we say where we go to and that's nice" (Catering 8)

"In the town, yeah they'll ask you where the Grand Theatre is and the post office yeah and you just say go out there, turn left, right you know"
(Catering 11)

Where the banks, bus station, railway station are (Catering 10 Notes)

"they're on their own, some of these kids that come over, they might ask if you know where somewhere is in (town) or if you know somewhere where they can get something, or…what's the food like and you can say yeah it's really good go there for a meal, things like that, or they might say do you know where the …and you give them directions" (Catering 3)

Student asked re nightlife and caretaker replied re where his kids went locally (Intake Day Observation Notes)

These staff may not formally be the appropriate staff member to ask for information but in practical terms they are accessible and present.

> "there's always somebody here to be helpful" (Catering 4)

> "they haven't got anybody else to ask" (Catering 3)

> *Even if I don't know the answer I like to point them in the direction of the answer.* (Caretaking 15 Notes)

The accessibility and helpful presence of thee staff position them to begin to get to know students.

6.4.3 Get to Know Them

Staff made an effort to greet, recognise and welcome students. Getting to know all of them was impossible, but over time some became familiar.

> "when you've got 23,000 students here … a lot of students
> and you try and be friendly with some of them, but you try to think, I know him, I know him, I know him, I remember him, I remember him, there's always something about a person." (Security 14)

> "I do ask their names and I try to remember ... that's nice on first name terms … cheeky ones and they say oh (name) that's really nice I love it"
> (Catering 8)

"to me its get to know people and if you can greet them by their names or enquire about their families or something they've told you about then they're really nice, they're pleased that you've remembered them. I think that's important to a person … to make them feel welcome I think. Well I think I'm quite like that kind of person anyway" (Catering 4)

Some they encountered regularly.

Serving them every day – get on first name terms, on the whole everybody is friendly (Catering 10 Notes)

"the students get to know us, you know, our names and all that, you get to know them that way, yes they come in most days" (Catering 11)

"it's the people who come every day" (Catering 8)

"I mean obviously if you see people on a daily basis, or a weekly basis, then you do get to … I stop on a night on Thursdays so I get to see the mature students. I'll get to know all … I mean I may not know their name I'll get to know what problems they've had and how they're getting on on their course … because I know them (Catering 4)

Get to know them over the year/9 months, some characters, some want to keep themselves to themselves (Catering 15 Notes)

Over time they chatted and got to know each other.

> "they might have a chat with me, oh isn't it a lovely day, just general things about the day. Or if they've got kids they might say to me oh how's your little girl getting on, oh she's fine how's your children, yeah that sort of thing" (Catering 3)

> "I will talk to anybody, how's things? coming from the off how are you? what course you doing? how long are you going to be here? Just asking simple questions then, after a few weeks what is your name? I can't keep saying who are you, like things like that so I kind of build up to it." (Catering 4)

> *Get to know students over the years, faces … Chat when come to the counter, when get served, do try and converse when possible - hello how y'rr doing I haven't seen you for a few days* (Catering 2 Notes)

This seems to demonstrate a willingness to be pro-active in continuing conversations with students, illustrated by an overheard exchange at a serving counter, beginning

> *how's your mum did you get to talk to her?* (Catering Observation Notes)

There was concern for the social integration of newcomers, one catering assistant described noticing the social clustering of students in the early weeks of the academic year. There was a gradual settling into groups at tables in the refectory, she chatted to those who seemed to be left out. Several staff had learned basic British Sign Language so they could greet and communicate better with deaf students.

There was particular consideration for international students.

> “they’re in a strange country anyway and they come to you and … it’s nice and they tell you about their country and I tell them about this one, it’s really nice, really nice” (Catering 8)

Others are welcomed back after an absence.

> *When they do come back tell about what they have been doing while away* (Catering 1 Notes)

> *Welcome back –Yr’ all right are you smile - Banter – Missing (town) - home sweet home – knew where student had been* (Intake Day Observation Notes)

> “we welcome them back, how’s the ... gone? how are you getting on with your new course? and things like that so I do enquire what they’ve done. Like some of the lads who are doing sport ... like on an exchange coaching out there, like they’re coming back in September telling me all about that … things like that you do get to know what they’re doing.” (Catering 4)

Interactions could be playful.

> *Do have some fun* (Catering 10 Notes)

> “you have a laugh with them you know” (Catering 11)

"it snowed and they'd never seen snow, they were really excited and I went outside with them, got told off (laughs) but it was really nice I like things like that, meeting other people" (Catering 8)

The familiarity of staff could be useful in times of trouble.

if there is a problem you can deal with it better if you know the person and they know you, at main site this is harder because of the number of people on site. (Caretaking 15)

6.4.4 They Will Tell You

There can be an exchange of information regarding personal circumstances with staff listening to personal and academic worries. Some were happy to listen to concerns and discuss problems with students, others were more reserved.

Students tell about holidays, girlfriends, boyfriends, husbands, wives, waiting for mortgages… and ask me how you're doing and how is your family" (Catering 10 Notes)

Surprising sitting on this chair they will tell you the most intimate details of their lives. Especially if stressed about exams. It is a form of counselling going on here. (Catering 1 Notes)

"I mean I wouldn't like to say that we're agony aunts because I think that gets too personal. I think when your at work with students you still have to have that, I'm an employee of the uni and you're a student of the uni ... You can't get too close sort of thing, but you can just sort of have, you know, what I call general chit chat" (Catering 3)

> "You know you get to know their life story sort of thing … what country they're from and what the country is like back at home and I think it makes them feel a bit more at ease" (Catering 3)

> "they come and just say hello and …haven't done me work or something and say well (laugh) you know, and just … share it with general sort of chit chat with them you know" (Catering 11)

One catering assistant talked of a student coming into the refectory before going to do a course presentation. The student was very frightened and they spent time together encouraging her. After the presentation the student came back to report what she had successfully accomplished.

These relationships happen within the time frame of each student's period of study. Then comes graduation and students leave.

6.4.5 Goodbye

> *They say goodbye finished been here three years – surprised seems … remember them starting* (Catering 1 Notes)

They celebrate graduation,

> "I've come to show you my gown and that is really nice, I do like stuff like that" (Catering 8)

and visit.

> *Come in and see our favourite ladies (students bring visitors to meet catering staff)* (Catering 10 Notes)

> "Just after Christmas when we come back two lads came here that left 3 years ago and they came in to see us and they were really nice and that was really good, kiss and a hug"
>
> (Catering 8)

Early encounters could have a lasting effect.

> *October, (students) been here a few weeks, went into the kitchen to repair something and girl crying. Sat and talked for a couple of hours - should have been doing some other work I suppose – that girl stopped – not saying it was me but here for 4 years and saw her around, every Christmas come to reception with present. When she left, card/flowers/whisky - card said – I will never forget that first day in the kitchen - that meant the world to me.*
>
> (Caretaker 15 Notes)

At the university a large population was dispersed across five sites miles apart. Each site was self-contained, many staff and students may have attended only one of them. The core population of staff and students numbered around 26,000 people not all of whom would be present at any time. Students studying at various paces, at different times of the day or week, across the whole year, encountered a fragmented workforce. Staff were divided by working hours, level of engagement, occupational status and contractual security. It seems likely that within this fragmented population there were parallel groups who rarely, if ever, encountered each other. Within this peopled workplace catering, caretaking and security staff were employed to work in public areas. Here they encountered students. These staff are skilled in customer service, perceiving students as customers and important for job security. There was frequent social contact, provision of information and support with some relationships built over time. It may be that they were positioned to have different relationships with students than the other staff available. They were there when other staff

were not and went to places where other staff did not go. All wore uniforms allowing recognition as university staff.

People turned to them for day-to-day help and in emergencies. Within these encounters staff had a degree of autonomy in content and approach. This presence allowed a range of encounters with students at times of relaxation, tension, distress and danger. These staff responded to questions as a constant part of their work. There was a sense of responsibility and care towards the university population, particularly students. The general approach to students was friendly, tolerant and supportive with some exasperation and occasional animosity. They offered knowledge derived from experience, familiarity with the university and the locality. Information, practical and emotional support was offered and in some cases, affectionate relationships were built over time.

The approach to work described by these staff members was pragmatic, working for money and seeking the best conditions within the local labour market. They offered flexible working practices, responding to fluctuating workload and staffing levels. Their work was closely structured as to time, place and activity. These staff offered a mobile and reliable presence throughout the year. Therefore they developed knowledge about the university and deployed vigilance in identifying hazards and responding to dangers. They were engaged in pro-active management of peoples' emotions and behaviour, requiring self-management and skillful communication. Security and caretaking staff had to navigate the conflicting requirements of customer service and containing dangerous behaviour. Mediating in disputes and protecting others placed them in danger and they relied on each other for assistance. These activities were subject to legislation and regulation, requiring documentation. Although they had little direct control over the structural tensions in which they operated, they were exposed to possible repercussions as individuals.

In the next chapter, Chapter 7, this contribution to the life of the university is discussed through consideration of people's perceptions of the job, their position in the institution and approach to flexible working practices. The way they used the unstructured work activity of social interactions is discussed with a focus on their role in the management of emotion in the workplace. The informal social activities described by staff raise questions about their contribution to the process of induction and orientation of new students, this is considered in some detail.

Chapter 7 – Contribution to University Life

This research was concerned with universities as physical places in which people gather for a range of reasons. The focus has been on the staff whose work is to supply and guard the built environment and its populations. Universities are more usually discussed in the context of their intellectual activities, yet developments in the sector have created large, fragmented and dispersed university populations. As previously noted, published discussion of the experience of these populations has been dominated by the perspective of academics. A different perspective has been presented in the last two chapters with a focus on the views of catering, caretaking and security staff. This chapter first considers the occupational status of these staff and then reviews the insights gained into the perception these staff have of their jobs and how they manage the flexibility required of them. The discussion then moves to the social and emotional engagement of their continual interactions with other people. The final part of the chapter considers the role of these staff in the orientation and engagement of students.

7.1. Perceptions of Occupational Status

Within the university workplace one of the obvious differences *between* staff was internal occupational status. It was a workplace organised in an occupational hierarchy and catering, caretaking and security staff were positioned in the lowest employment grades in this hierarchy. Academic staff are generally perceived to have highest occupational status, their jobs being most closely associated with the core purpose of these institutions. There were two basic forms of contract of employment in use which reflected differences in status. These mirrored the service employment relationship and specific labour contract described in Chapter 1. Assuming that the contract used for academic staff is of higher status, the differences between this and the second form of contract can be taken to indicate what was valued. This was a greater level of autonomy, a larger leave entitlement, flexibility in working hours and less necessity for physical attendance. Some academic and catering staff shared the uncertainty of fixed term contracts. This was partly because of the seasonal nature of

the work, including teaching, partly because of fixed term project funding. All staff had recently had unsettling indications of job insecurity because of budget cuts, restructuring and voluntary redundancies. This could raise questions over who is considered most dispensable, which may not match with formal occupational status.

Autonomy was not an obvious feature of the work of catering, caretaking and security staff who were subject to high levels of control, by managers, by each other and by the requirements of safe customer service. There were five or six levels of managers above these staff in the university hierarchy. Operational requirements created control of time and place, such as serving food at advertised times, opening and closing sites at specified times and preparing rooms for specific functions. They had to be present in particular places for most of their time on duty and absence would be obvious. These staff were subject to constant surveillance, through CCTV and the visibility of their work stations, activities and outputs. Anyone attending a university site could have seen their work outputs and watched their work. Incompetence, negligence or absence could be quickly noticed and reported. Their activities were determined by managers in response to the circumstances of the shift. However, control by individual managers was restricted to deployment. This was a unionised workplace with an inheritance of Local Authority employment practices. Disputes and dismissal had organisational procedures, unlike much of the hospitality industry and some other types of previous jobs. There were occasional intimations of tensions between staff and those structuring and directing their work, grumbles rather than conflict. Supervisory roles did not seem to be attractive, the financial rewards for taking on extra responsibility were limited as were promotion routes.

Security staff had an ambiguous position in being subject to control and also required to control the behaviour of others. Staff amongst the lowest paid in the university undertook the greatest risks and responsibility in times of emergency. Occupational relations were reversed with staff, however senior, being subject to their instructions. This change from subordinate to dominant status was contested by some and led to conflict. They were required to enforce the rules made by higher status staff, who could resist having to then

obey them, or see themselves as having autonomy in deciding when and how to obey them (Clegg, 1989). They worked in interdependent groups where individual actions could detrimentally affect their peers, even put them at risk. The approval or disapproval of their colleagues asserted another form of control. Staff were aware of being legally limited in their interventions, particularly around physical contact and restraint. Inappropriate behaviour, or the accusation of it, could have serious personal consequences.

A further indication of status was the way in which a scarce resource was allocated. In a densely populated environment, private space was valuable. Density of occupation was different on the five university sites, the city centre site having least room and privacy. In new buildings open plan working areas had been instituted, with indications of a hostile reception. This accords with the general trend of maximising space by reducing privacy to create communal work areas (Stantec, 2009). During the study it was observed that rooms were allocated in different ways. Senior academic staff had private offices or shared with a colleague. More junior academic staff shared an office between several colleagues. Most administrative staff had open plan accommodation or high occupancy work rooms. Students could book a small number of cells in learning centres but otherwise had no private space unless they were residential. Catering, caretaking and security staff worked in public areas most of the time with some shared private work areas for specific tasks. Some parts of the physical infrastructure which constituted their work areas were so unconsidered they were omitted from the statistical returns. The definition of the institutional internal area

> "…. does not include those parts of buildings which enable them to function"
>
> Hefce, 2011 p.25

These are explained as including corridors, stairs, entrance foyers, lifts, lobbies, toilets, loading bays and store rooms. Thus the silence in the academic commentary is echoed in the silence of the statistical data.

Status may also be indicated by clothing. There is a paradox in the position of uniformed staff in that uniforms both identify and depersonalise. For these staff their uniforms identified them as staff, removing the possibility of anonymity available to other staff. Catering assistants wore name badges identifying them individually, reducing their choices further. However, the person wearing the uniform could be overlooked, with only their function being noticed. Tonybee (2003) noticed this social invisibility, as she worked in uniformed occupations during her research into low paid work. She encountered several people who knew her socially and professionally but did not recognise her. Such a combination of visibility and depersonalisation exposed these staff to unpleasant encounters perceived as rude and denigrating. These were described with annoyance and frustration. It was indicated that there was inequity in the procedures used to protect people in such circumstances. There may be discrepancies between indications of status and the reality of working practice. Such a discrepancy was reported, with irony, by night shift security staff. From late evening to early morning they had responsibility for the security of all university property, students and visitors, yet they were not allowed a key to the safe on one site. They commented on not being able to lock up lost property or accept recorded delivery post.

The absence of catering, caretaking and security staff in the literature written by their academic colleagues could also be taken as an indication of low organisational status. Within academic commentary the focus on occupational status is the shifting dominance of different professional groups (Hussey & Smith, 2010). Occupations have generally been ranked against academics as the benchmark of university status (Collinson, 2007). This preoccupation was not identified amongst catering, caretaking and security staff. There was little demarcation of other occupations. General categories such as people *from the offices* and *managers* were mentioned. The term *academic* seemed to be used as a generic term for people not identified as anything else rather than a specific designation. Two staff did use the term *lecturer*, otherwise there was no differentiation between different academic

roles. The primary sense of joint enterprise seemed to be with direct colleagues rather than the academic function or with management (Coyle-Shapiro & Kessler, 2000). It is with these colleagues that interdependent work groups are formed providing some continuity in a changing workplace requiring flexible working practices.

7.2 **Adaptability, Flexibility, Mobility**

Much of the recent discussion of work emphasises a growing precariousness and the need to adapt to this. This is a theme running throughout the literature about work in universities. Trowler (1997) came to the view that the people who were going to cope within the developing university sector were those who enjoyed and welcomed change. The staff who were interviewed during the study had worked at the University from three to over thirty years. Those observed staff who mentioned their length of employment had worked there for between one and twenty five years. This low turnover was in line with other staff working in universities (JNCHES, 2008) and in stark contrast to that found by Toynbee (2003) in public sector agency workers. It raised the possibility of individuals or groups of staff developing reservoirs of knowledge that potentially could inform the effective working of the institution. Long-term employment also allowed for the development of pride in the quality of their formal work activities and perceived improvement in the range of services and customer service reported by research participants. This was linked to the importance of reputation to the University and consequently to job security.

During this period there had been changes in the university which had been accommodated in the routine of work.

> "…. been change in every way …Yeah just change, and you don't even realise you've been here that long you just carry on and then another year gone and another year gone, you know" (Catering 11)

These research participants described changes to their jobs and work environment in complex ways. Some changes had been imposed through organisational restructuring, expansion and modernisation. Staff had been required to adapt to new situations, some of which had been inconvenient, frightening and involved loss. Yet other changes had brought new opportunities and improved employment conditions. Some changes had been sought, because of family commitments, life stage, health, personal preference and ambition. While all university occupation groups are likely to have experienced change in this rapidly expanding sector, they may not have experienced it in the same way.

7.2.1 Perceptions of the Job

The reported experiences of these catering, caretaking and security staff accord only in part with the literature regarding other university occupation groups. Most of this literature has focussed on the particular pressures of the intensification of work of academic staff. Many of these concerns are either not experienced or not held in equal importance by the staff participating in this research. The generic nature of their work positions them differently in the labour market, in that there are many local possibilities of place and type of work, whereas for academics there are few universities. Catering, caretaking and security staff looked outward at other employers and previous occupations. When they looked back, they reported the present as preferable. Favourable comparisons with previous jobs in different sectors were made in terms of pay, shift patterns, locations of work and physical working conditions. Catering staff made this point most strongly with relative institutional stability contrasted with the precarious nature of the wider hospitality industry. The large university population provided a constantly renewing customer base. Society's need for education gave hope that jobs would continue and public funding eased tight profit margins. Other staff spoke of their job as secondary to a more important role or as one of a series of roles suited to their time of life. There was no resonance with the strand of nostalgia running throughout the literature which positions academic staff as looking inward at how things in universities once were, could be or should be.

Participants were exposed to many of the stressors that could be expected in low paid work within a large organisation. Of the factors identified by Blaug et al (2007), change, lack of control and bullying are relevant. People had been subject to frequent, repeated changes over years, many unwelcome, with no mechanism by which they could influence events. They were exposed to bullying, abusive and violent behaviour. They had the lowest official occupational status in an organisation where everyone else was employed at higher wage levels with no likelihood that this would change. These factors have been identified as associated with stress and ill-health (Marmot, 2004; Layard, 2005). However, no one in the interviews or observed sessions mentioned the word stress in relation to themselves or their work. There was awareness of the term, two people used it in respect of students being stressed at exam time. This contrasts strongly with the reported experience of academic staff.

Academic trade union material on stress and excessive work demands was observed posted on university notice boards. Academic research concerned with university staff has assumed occupational stress, with its permutations a prominent area of investigation (Tytherleigh et al, 2005; Kinman 2003). Common stressors identified by academic staff were an unsatisfactory balance between work and home, role conflict, heavy workload, an increase in disliked tasks and diminished status. Contact with colleagues and students was valued but other pressures enforced more isolated working practices (Rhodes et al, 2007; Nixon, 1996; Abouserie, 1996).

Considering these stresses in turn, it seems few of these preoccupations are shared by catering, caretaking and security staff. Catering staff commented on tensions between work and home life with a different emphasis. They located themselves primarily within their families, employment was secondary and organised around children. The price they paid was contractual insecurity and lack of money. Two people had taken their current jobs with a reduction in status and pay, wanting working hours that fitted better with their family life. Others accepted precarious employment to fit with school terms. The nature of the work of catering, caretaking and security staff reduced the likelihood of role conflict within their jobs.

There was a tension in the work of security staff between a customer service role and that of enforcement. This was collective and acknowledged in job descriptions and training. This is different to the role conflict described for academic staff where individuals struggled to meet conflicting demands and the expectations of different groups. The workload described by catering, caretaking and security staff appeared manageable. There were times of intense activity, people got tired, even exhausted, but there were also lulls in activity. There was some indication of an easing of some areas of work. Whereas for academic staff the bits of their jobs providing least satisfaction were said to be increasing (Tight 2009), conversely for these staff, some disliked aspects of work might be seen to be decreasing because of structural change. Examples are the closing of the Students Union bars meaning fewer encounters with drunken students, the splitting of security and caretaking roles, the installation of a permanent night shift and new machinery. However, the building and refurbishment programme had created extra work. These staff valued social engagement with colleagues and students. It was a continual and mainly pleasing occurrence, in contrast with academics reporting a diminution of contact. However they were more exposed to difficult behaviour, unable to withdraw into private office space and lacking the protection of high occupational status.

The low status of the work of these staff has been described as associated with the degree to which they were subject to close control. The work of catering, and security staff has been described previously as closely structured as to time, place and task, while caretakers were less constrained. However, all these groups were subject to constant surveillance from colleagues, managers and the whole university population. Within this tight structure opportunities arose for discretionary activity. They were required to accept variety of task and location and to manage a variety of interactions. These flexible work patterns affected the contact they had with the university population. Social interactions with this population provided moments of unsupervised work.

7.2.2 Flexible, Varied and Mobile Working Practices

In order to provide services all day, every day, on all sites, participants were required to work shifts. Shift work is not discussed in academic commentary concerning staff working practices although for institutions to function it is likely to be a usual working practice for some staff. It is suggested that universities have had to become more customer orientated with students and commercial customers expecting resources to be available at times convenient to themselves (Milburn, 2009; Barnett & Temple, 2006). The University sought flexibility from catering, caretaking and security staff to cater for seasonal fluctuations of work and to provide access at all times. Such flexible working practices can be exploitative. Employers may seek the most efficient deployment of expensive resources irrespective of the effect on individual employees. Flexibility of working hours and location places people where and when needed, allowing reduced staff numbers and heavier workloads. To allow this flexibility of deployment workers need to be able to undertake any task required. This can be facilitated by standardising tasks and breaking them into the lowest skill level components. People can be allocated to repeating one component, or they can be deployed on a series of easily taught tasks, making them interchangeable. This process requires highly structured and controlled working practices reducing autonomy and control over pace of work (Thompson, 1989; Braverman, 1998). This process can be facilitated by dividing the intellectual and organisational aspect of processes from the implementation of them. Planning and decisions about a complete process can be made in a place occupationally and geographically distant from the people who carry out the individual tasks, essentially devaluing work for some (Burawoy, 1979).

Such a process has been described in considering the diminishing labour power of academics, particularly for younger staff who are less likely to have permanent work. The flexibility of course provision has arguably led to teaching staff requiring lower level skills. They can therefore be employed on fixed term contracts to deliver specific modules. Drawing on established materials, working to a pre-determined schedule, not embedded in the university infrastructure, it is argued that they can become interchangeable (Graham

2002; Bridges, 2000; King, 1995). In the case study university there had been budget cuts, redundancies and a recruitment freeze. It could be expected that working processes would have intensified. The preoccupations of academic staff in informal conversations accords with this literature. However, for the catering, caretaking and security staff the situation seems less clear. The requirement to provide cover for absent colleagues and vacant posts increased workload. However, it was also considered to have led to an increase in their skill and knowledge base and improved employment prospects. The process of standardisation and fragmentation of work process was apparent in the catering work and commented on by several people. Activities had been standardised across all sites. Within refectories there had been a move away from consistent jobs to deployment on whatever task had priority at any time. But alongside this process was an expansion in small catering outlets offering snack products. These had reduced the workload in refectories and extended the skill range of staff engaged in the more complex tasks of providing a complete service. However, although more complex jobs had been constructed in some cases, it was within a limited range. Staff had no role in decisions about the product range, costing or suppliers.

In theory security and caretaking roles had been split. This could have led to greater specialisation and less variety in the work, which could be construed as deskilling. However, the reality on the ground was that caretakers had to do security work, formally on some sites and informally on others. This left caretaking staff exposed to dangerous situations without the protective clothing or training thought necessary for security staff. Many security staff had been caretakers, there were anecdotes of fully uniformed security staff on patrol pulling a tool out of their pocket to mend something rather than reporting it. Although this may have been individually satisfying, it meant they were providing a more complex set of skills than was formally acknowledged and undertaking an increased workload.

Part of the requirement for flexibility arose from the seasonal nature of the university activities. Seasonal variation had different implications for these groups of staff. The built estate was a constant as was the requirement to maintain and guard it. The population inhabiting it fluctuated in number and purpose. This affected the workload of security and

caretaking staff but not the need for their presence. Fluctuating demand for catering was reflected in the use of fixed term, repeating contracts with staff having different levels of job security. Extra work to meet specific events meant people could be competing for extra hours and wages. The picture is therefore mixed. Staff have retained job complexity at the cost of unacknowledged and unprotected work. They have acquired the capacity for the self management of an area of work but have no certainty of deployment to it. Learning each others' jobs has increased skill levels and labour market value but decreased consistency of work. Flexibility of working patterns helps to avoid the pressures of repetitive work but is imposed and can be inconvenient. This flexibility extends to variety of activity and locations.

There was a tension in the way the work of these staff was organised. It was highly structured, subject to control and surveillance. Yet it was also unpredictable, varied, mobile and peopled. Staff from each of the three occupation groups commented on variety in their work. This could be categorised in three ways: variation in task and location; interactions with a variety of people; variety arising through exposure to the unexpected. Catering Assistants had the greatest uncertainty of how and where they would be deployed. Although they had varied tasks within various outlets, essentially they were in fixed positions, leaving only to deliver buffets and refreshments. Always located in places where people gathered, they had constant opportunities for conversations. Of the three occupation groups they were least exposed to unpredictable events and had least responsibility when they did occur.

Security staff had greatest certainty of the basic organisation of their working day. Deployment was on static, patrol or control duties in a pre-arranged sequence with a usual work team. Occasional variation would arise from a requirement to work at a site different to their usual place of work, with different equipment and colleagues. They were mobile around pre-designated points. They reported for duty to pick up radios and be briefed, thereafter they worked in set periods of patrolling designated buildings and static duty. Relief from these duties was the time spent in monitoring CCTV. Usually they had only short periods

when they were moving freely from one position to another. They therefore had constant, often fleeting, contact with anyone moving around the site in which they worked. Within this structure they had primary responsibility for responding to emergencies and incidents.

Caretakers were generally deployed on one site. Their role was inherently responsive and consequently the least structured. Static duties comprised the routine staffing of reception desks and monitoring CCTV. Requests to fix things, open, set up and clear rooms took them around the sites. They went on refuse collection and security patrols, did deliveries and moved furniture from one place to another. Moving around all parts of the sites and staffing static contact points they had a great variety of social encounters. They shared the unpredictability of dealing with incidents when they adopted security and emergency duties.

Gabriel (1995) argues that in any organisation and workload there is space that cannot be managed, offering opportunities for unsupervised activity and that, within these, are the potential for play and chat. For these staff most work was supervised and observed. Flexible working patterns and individual mobility offered some unpredictable deployment, but it was mainly to the same set of tasks under the same level of surveillance. They largely welcomed variety although it could be accompanied by irritation and loss of familiar environments and colleagues. This attitude was of benefit to their employer enabling flexibility of deployment. Flexibility was also useful to staff, since apart from skill acquisition, variety in routine was often welcomed as increasing interest and decreasing boredom. However, for all these staff much of the interest on a routine shift came from frequent, varied and often brief social encounters. It was within these that they could exercise some degree of unsupervised activity. For catering staff, interactions with people coming into their work stations provided most opportunities for daily autonomy. Security and caretaking staff had greater levels of formal autonomy within these interactions than catering staff. This autonomy could be used to address the perceived drawbacks of their jobs. The uses they made of informal and uncontrolled opportunities were partly pro-active and partly reactive. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) suggest people can use such opportunities to assert control over aspects of their work to improve their jobs. Contrary to some of the labour process

literature, the seemingly low status of the job did not prevent significant deliberate acts to craft a work environment, job tasks or social connections. By engaging in opportunities to interact with different people, staff provided interest and a sociable work environment for themselves. Banter and chat helped to alleviate boredom, a problem mentioned by several staff. It had a role in self-preservation, creating pleasing encounters helped avoid complaints and future problems. Some people placed their willingness to interact in their social preferences, they liked talking and they enjoyed being with people. For some these encounters provided emotional satisfaction, helping people was important to them. This can be a characteristic of people engaged in service work, taking pleasure in satisfying customers (Korczynski, 2003). It also allowed staff to assert control in how they exercised authority. There was a sense of mischief in allowing someone to nip into the university to use a toilet while insisting senior staff showed their passes. The exploitation of pride in a capacity for hard work and pleasure in the cohesion of a group engaged in hard physical work together was identified by Toynbee (2003). This can be seen in the pride of the teams in their capacity to handle any incident and manage the workload of the busiest times. However, a more general pride in their contribution to the quality of the service was referred to as important by some staff, indicating a more personal ethical belief (Sennett, 1998).

Situations were described in which staff chose to act outside the remit of their jobs to satisfy their view of the scope of their work. This could cause disagreement with colleagues. Two difficult situations were described by security staff. One in which a staff member continued to chase someone after they left university premises. Concern was expressed that other staff, if called on for back up would also have been outside their remit and possibly outside insurance cover. In another a caretaker went to protect a woman being attacked in a car park. This endangered him and the security staff who went to help, but the alternative was to leave her undefended. In a more gentle form the question of insurance was raised by a catering assistant who had helped someone use a toilet when their support assistant had been away. She knew this was against regulations but chose to help someone in a difficult predicament. A caretaker offering encouragement and comfort to a distressed student was aware it was outside the detail of his job. In three of these encounters the staff used an

external framework to justify their actions. The security officer cited an instruction from the police, the catering assistant the imperative of customer service and the caretaker his overall role in keeping the university running smoothly.

These staff were employed to work in public areas in a peopled workplace. Social interactions with others inevitably occurred around the work tasks they were employed to perform. Yet these interactions were not explicitly covered by the formal requirements of their jobs. Job descriptions stated tasks, they did not engage with the social context in which tasks were carried out. Caretakers and security personnel were only expected to have *effective inter-personal skills*. Catering assistants required *a pleasant manner with a customer-focused approach*. Their behaviour in some of the interactions they reported went well beyond the function required of them. Staff were undertaking voluntary activities in allowing themselves to be socially available.

7.3 **Chat, Laughter, Emotions and Organisational Mood**

In many of these informal social interactions there were opportunities to initiate and respond to social chat and humour. The question arises as to whether this can be viewed as a work activity. Chat and laughter could be seen as simply the preferred expression of sociable people. It is suggested that chatting can be valuable in maintaining work networks and passing on organisationally useful information and insight into the hidden rules of an organisation (Star & Strauss, 1999). This could be particularly useful for newcomers. Chatting could also be a vehicle for the reassurance and comfort that was a prominent aspect of the interactions of these staff. It could be seen as contributing to fostering a sense of a community through the interchange of reciprocal information.

Laughter has been a striking feature of this research. Humorous exchanges were frequently observed. Holmes (2000) suggests the main purpose of humour is to amuse, with specific social functions arising from amusing particular people at particular times. How humour is used therefore can have various organisational functions. Different forms of humour were

used by these staff who at times deployed it deliberately to achieve a specific work outcome. The clearest examples of this were security staff using humour to reduce tension in everyday difficult interactions such as refusing admission. Security staff have to control the behaviour of people who may perceive themselves as of higher status. They are required to enact two potentially conflicting roles, that of customer service and containment. Humour can offer a means of giving instructions in a way that allows people to save face while obeying an order. The use of banter can be a way of reducing status differences allowing people to co-operate. The mockery of management can be seen as a way of challenging the social position of low status work (Cooper, 2008). Security staff responded with laughter to anecdotes asserting their occupational power. A story that acknowledged an insult and used repartee to reject it was greeted with pleasure. Cynicism over managerial priorities was expressed in wry jokes. Banter and in-jokes can also be seen as a means of strengthening bonds between groups and within teams of people of equal status, by building collective humour (Holmes, 2000; Cooper, 2008). Korczynski (2003) suggests that workers may help each other manage the distress of abusive behaviour from customers, forming communities of coping and the use of laughter could be seen as engaging shared understanding. Fun, affection and generosity in humour was described in factory work by Westwood (1984) between colleagues in and outside the workplace creating strong, defiant allegiances. This was displayed in the security staff training sessions where people contributed to each other's jokes. It was also used to demark status with competitive wit and sparring as a hierarchal tactic observed in interchanges between men. Establishing strong group cohesion could be particularly important for these staff because their safety depends on each other (Mann, 2004). In turn the safety of the university population rests with their capacity to deal with emergencies. Humour may also help staff manage their emotions at such encounters (Evans, 2001). However, the more destructive function of reinforcing group status was seen in examples of teasing and mockery (Watts, 2007). A further use of humour is in establishing social connections. Jokes may be used to establish common ground, eliciting revealing responses enabling people to check similarity of attitude (Holmes, 2000). This was apparent in the behaviour of catering staff during interviews as they ascertained how I fitted in with them. Security staff also engaged me in repartee as my presence was established with each group.

Having experienced this it seems possible this testing is a part of the function of the bantering and having a laugh with students which was both reported and observed.

Laughter and play cannot be taken as indications of overall enjoyment of the work. It may also be a means of surviving it. Having a laugh was reported as important in getting through the day. Sick jokes and absurdity were used to reflect on distressing incidents. Theorists suggest that humour is used by low status workers in surviving monotonous working practices and resisting control (Taylor & Bain 2003; Collinson, 1988). In this context the function of building strong working relationships through humour is to establish places of refuge and pleasure in an alienating workplace (Watts, 2007). In these mobile and socially competent people humour could also be seen as a pro-active means of improving the general work environment and working day. By using humour to defuse conflict, build relationship and release emotion, staff could improve the work environment in which they were located and from which they could not withdrawn (Mann,2004; Taylor & Bain 2003). Mild jokes and playful comments eliciting a chuckle or smile were particularly noticeable from security staff on static duty and catering staff at serving counters. These could be construed as a deliberate way of presenting a friendly working persona in order to elicit pleasing behaviour in others.

The move towards students being perceived as customers raises the importance of frontline customer service. These staff were the representatives of the University most likely to meet the student body as a whole on all sites. Although students are adults and responsible for their own part of interactions, the primary work activity of managing many encounters, particularly difficult ones, relied on the capacity of the staff. The use of chat and humour appeared to be deliberately deployed, so having an important workplace function. This informal, discretionary, activity arguably made an important contribution to the social processes of the institution. But the question remains as to whether it can be considered as an employment skill. Communication skills and people skills are popular concepts that are hard to define (Belt, Richardson and Webster, 2002). Whether social competencies are natural attributes or employment skills is debated. For an employer the distinction would

inform staffing procedures. Natural aptitude would affect recruitment choices, a skill set would affect staff training and pay. All the previous jobs of the staff who mentioned them involved a considerable element of getting on with others. This may mean they were attracted to work that involves interactions with other people or could be taken as an indication they had well practised skills. If it is considered that the use of chat and humour are skills there is still a question as to whether they are sufficiently rare to attract extra pay. It is argued that a desire to find meaning in low paid service work leads to attempts to reframe widespread social capacity, such as smiling on demand, to job grading and pay (Payne, 2009). This is considered further within the context of the management of emotions in which staff seemed to deploy well honed, leant skills, to manage others behaviour. Reporting conversations about other peoples' emotional, relationship and work problems was a feature of the perceptions of work of these staff, particularly with catering assistants and caretakers. Catering staff reported least contact with violent emotions, rather responding to peoples' anxiety and social distress.

7.3.1 Managing Emotion

Catering, caretaking and security staff spoke of emotions, their own and other peoples'. They spoke of basic emotions, such as irritation, frustration, anger, tension, excitement, anxiety, fear, disgust, attraction, amusement and sympathy. Emotions which develop over time such as love, liking, pride and boredom were raised. Emotional engagement had pro-active forms, managing other peoples' emotions to obtain a desired outcome. Re-active forms involved managing their own emotional responses. Emotional arousal affects the attention available for other cognitive activity. By helping people manage their emotions these staff may have helped them control their mood, allowing them to focus on other things. By managing their own emotions and avoiding responses which may escalate conflicts these staff may have contributed to the overall mood of the institution (Evans, 2001). The public nature of their job, their continual presence and low occupational status exposed these staff to difficult behaviour. Dealing with rudeness and verbal abuse was reported in informal conversations with other university staff but only as an occasional experience. This accords

with the suggestion that violence, abuse, bullying and aggression are now an occupational reality for university staff but may not be evenly distributed. The suggestion is that lower status staff are subject to greater levels of abusive behaviour (Lee, 2006; UNISON, 2005; Baty, 2005; Boynton, 2005). For security staff verbal abuse and aggression were spoken of as routine, with some indication that low level incidents are not reported or recorded. Many such incidents were observed during the study. More serious incidents were common and could be dangerous, using discretion was an inherent part of dealing with emergencies. For security staff, the autonomy of action identified by Patterson et al (2009) as necessary to manage difficult, everyday, encounters was referred to many times. Different people had different approaches, depending on the situation, their mood and level of tolerance. Each situation had to be assessed and a decision taken whether to engage and if so to what extent and in what way. In dangerous encounters the presence of weapons, whether a person was known to them and whether they could be observed and backed-up by colleagues were important factors in the assessment. In describing incidents staff mentioned being faced with an axe, a full syringe and a knife as well as fists and feet. Part of this assessment was the limit to the remit and individual responsibility of each staff member. There was clear demarcation between what staff on the ground should tackle and what should be referred on but this could be breached. Some staff expressed lack of confidence in their knowledge in this area and perceived discrepancies between their instructions, job description and staff manual. Further exposure arose from being the staff everyone else would call on for help in difficult situations.

In order to manage emotional states, it is necessary to identify them accurately. In order to manage emotional interactions it is important to maintain the capacity to respond with helpful behaviour (Evans, 2001). Concepts such as emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, 2007) have been applied to the workplace. One strand of this suggests that identifying and effectively dealing with emotions and emotionally difficult situations are competencies which can be deployed when required (Ciarrochi & Scott, 2006). It is suggested that emotions are universal and that non-verbal signals of basic emotions are recognisable irrespective of culture. Emotions are accompanied by physical signals in facial expression, stance and tone

of voice (Evans, 2001). It is therefore possible to overlay one emotion with the non-verbal expression of another. The ability to express insincere emotion can be useful at work for both self-interest and an employer's interests. When deployed at the behest of an employer this capacity becomes a form of work (Hochschild, 1983). Catering, caretaking and security staff were continually engaged in face-to-face service interactions with customers. A worker's manipulation of their own emotional presentation can be viewed as a necessary part of a successful manipulation of a service customer's behaviour and satisfaction. Their emotional presentation, social capacity and demeanour were therefore arguably valuable to the university (Bolton, 2009).

Discussion of emotional engagement in work concentrates on the emotional labour in expressing insincere emotion and suppressing sincere. Hochschild (1983) offers a distinction between surface or deep acting of emotions. Surface acting is pretending to feel emotions that you don't by deploying appropriate physical emotional signals. Deep acting requires actually engendering the required emotion, which may be most convincing but carries greater risks. Surface acting may have a protective function in allowing detachment from a situation so avoiding distress. Over time deep acting may be harmful to the worker, unless they manage to adapt to the tension of continual effort. A successful adaptation means altering feelings to align to the requirements of an employer or adapting behaviour to align with feelings, risking problems with the employer (Mann, 2004). Having control over the level and form of emotional labour can alleviate some adverse effects. These alternatives have been considered for service workers who are physically restrained and whose interactions are constant, such as air line cabin staff and call centre workers (Derry, Iverson & Walsh, 2002). The options may be less stark for less constrained workers. Mann (2004) offers a distinction between concepts of emotional congruence and dissonance. Congruence occurs when displayed emotion and felt emotion match. Emotional dissonance occurs when a pretended emotion matches the appropriate display but is not genuinely felt. These may be more useful in considering service interactions between people which may be frequent, regular and carry the potential for developing relationships.

In the university there seemed to be frequent opportunities for these staff to exhibit congruent emotional expression, dissonant expression was deliberately deployed on occasion. These are unusual customer/service staff interactions because they have the potential to develop over time. Affection, friendly feelings, interest and companionship were reported as genuine emotional engagement with students. In some cases a genuine emotional impulse was hampered by the employer which required staff to deploy another form of emotional management (Mann, 2004). Deliberate display of dissonant emotion was reported by catering staff being extra nice and polite to difficult customers. Security and catering staff spoke of the importance of emotional management in defusing conflict. Staff were not officially required to be friendly. The university trained some staff in managing difficult encounters and reading emotion through non-verbal signs. The requirements of customer service were prominent in staff training but the deployment of friendliness was not explicitly stated. However, an employer's requirement for staff to deploy their emotional capacity can be signalled formally or through informal working norms (Mann, 2004). This employer prominently marketed itself as the 'Friendly University'. The message was ubiquitous, unfriendly presentation could be perceived as against the institutional norm. It can therefore be argued that chat, humour and emotional management can be considered as work activities. The deliberate deployment of these to achieve specific work outcomes can be described as skilful. This presents the possibility that the level of social skill demonstrated by staff may not be formally recognised, creating a form of workload that goes unregarded (Thompson & Smith 2010). This may be particularly the case in social interactions with students.

In attempting to understand the work and contribution to organisational processes of these staff, the existing literature about university work is therefore not helpful. It is useful in establishing organisational context but not in enabling findings about academic staff to be generalised across other staff groups. If the activities and experience of working in a university are different from that of academic work is the nature of the workplace relevant? One uncertainty about the employment situation of these staff was whether the university

would be perceived as a particular kind of workplace, different to others. This was raised by different people with different views. The regulated nature of employment was seen as important rather than the purpose of the institution because this had implications for employment conditions and acceptable treatment. It was also seen as the same as any other big employer with the occupation being more important in determining the experience of work. Some features of university employment were mentioned as important, the type of possible customer and therefore quality of interactions was remarked on. The nature of university funding was seen as contributing to job security. It was also seen as a high status employer externally, therefore offering employment of an intrinsically higher status compared to other potential employers for similar jobs. The factor that most differentiated the university workplace was the one that is an inherent and dominant part of universities, the students.

In institutions which have a core purpose associated with a high status profession, the staff employed in all the other occupation groups within that institution may be designated as ancillary, there to support the work of the professional staff. In a hospital it is the medical function that carries status (Toynbee, 2003). In universities it is the academic function (Collinson, 2007). Support staff may be perceived as only operating within their formal functions, rather than as making an independent contribution to the core purpose of the institution. The participants in this research described deploying their social competencies in ways that have revealed helpful, purposeful, interactions with students. These unacknowledged actions have a value and sometimes a poignancy of their own and contribute directly to the core processes of the institution.

7.4 **Contribution to Students' Experience of University**

This contribution to the effective functioning and social capacity of the university by catering, caretaking and security staff can be seen to be important and overlooked in discussion of university life. Their specific contribution to the quality of the student experience is an aspect that demands more detailed examination, because it is at the heart of the existence of universities. A transitory, majority, population of students is a defining characteristic of the

university workplace. Student retention, satisfaction and completion are necessary to institutional income and survival. A larger percentage of the population engaging with higher education has meant students are sought from a wide social and academic base. Duration and mode of study has been altered through increased part-time participation and modular study, enabling access for students with external commitments. These changes increase the range of potential reasons for non-completion. Developing means of supporting students through their studies is therefore of importance to universities. Students are most likely to withdraw early in their first term or at the end of their first year. Therefore attention has been given to the process by which people encounter and adjust to this new experience. First year students' successful engagement with their university is thought to have two phases. The first is orientation within a new environment, the second is assimilation into the culture of the institution and the academic work (Harvey et al, 2006). These two phases are mirrored in the interactions with students described by catering, caretaking and security staff in the study.

7.4.1 Orientation and Integration

The first phase, orientation, requires familiarisation with a new environment, physically and socially. The reality of starting at university can be experienced as shocking with people overwhelmed by the size and complexity of the task. The scale of the physical estate can be daunting and the very breadth of university services designed to help students creates complexity. There is information to assimilate about personal support services, sports and social possibilities and the need for personal safety and health (Harvey et al, 2006). An introduction to the academic purpose of university, the course, study support, learning resources and teaching environment is necessary. There is concern that the array of initial information thought essential for students is frightening in itself. The academic and institutional expectations are signalled and the immensity of the task ahead of them is emphasised (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell & Mccune, 2008).

It is suggested that early experiences, particularly in the first two weeks may influence the capacity of students to sustain their studies from then on (Christie et al, 2008; Harvey et al, 2006). Universities address this by providing a period of induction with support from staff and more experienced students. Reviewing institutional arrangements for induction Harvey et al (2006) were concerned that it was seen as a discrete event, once it was over new entrants had no further specific help in settling in. They suggested there needed to be a more gradual process. Dhillon, McGowan and Wang (2008) found students saw an induction period as about staff needing to get a job done rather than it being suited to students' need for a more gradual approach.

Although they had no official role in induction, catering, caretaking and security staff were helpful in this phase. They described new intake students asking questions. Many of these were Where is? and How to? questions, as people tried to orientate themselves within a physical environment and administrative procedures. These staff were available for as long as it took, were approachable and knowledgeable. As well as supplementing the official sources of information they could offer help in other areas. They passed on practical information from one generation of students to the next and offered knowledge of the locality. Amidst the business there were opportunities for informal conversations in which reassurance, comfort and encouragement were offered.

The second phase, integration, is the process of adjusting to the new environment and developing a sense of belonging within the institution. Academic and social integration are thought to be equally important to students' capacity to sustain their studies. Early in their time at university social engagement is more important with the balance changing as they become more engaged with their courses. It is suggested the process of integration is enhanced by formal and informal social experiences which help to connect students with their institution (Christie et al, 2008). Catering, security and caretaking staff offered a formal

and an informal contribution to this process. In their formal roles they staffed the social and open access learning areas where students can develop social relationships with peers. Informally they engaged in friendly social interactions with students offering a consistent presence and developing relationships over time.

Becoming known as individuals was considered important for students to develop a sense of belonging (Yorke & Thomas, 2003) yet in an institution of 26,000 people the probability of anonymity is great. A college based, residential, university population meeting together in a defined academic year offers a chance for people to know each other (Bridges 2000). A larger, population accessing disparate sites dispersed throughout the whole year means students find themselves in an impersonal, complex, unfamiliar environment (Trowler, 1997). These staff were well placed to become acquainted with students through the frequent contacts occasioned by their work. Security staff greeted people coming on to university sites and buildings, recognising individuals and engaging in brief exchanges. Catering staff had regular customers, they described greeting students by name and remembering what people liked to eat and drink. Staffing refectories and cafes they could see socially isolated individuals and chat to them.

As people became more familiar with each other, further social behaviour was reported and observed which could help students develop a sense of belonging. Some of these were fleeting, staff were observed to smile, wave and call out greetings to people as they moved around the sites. They smiled at people approaching reception and serving counters. Some encounters were brief, there was often a short chat or banter as an order or request was dealt with, people left smiling. As the data has shown some staff had taken considerable effort to enable such encounters, learning basic British Sign Language. Sometimes staff brought someone else into the conversation, from the queue or a passer by, so a brief three way interaction developed. Staff commented on exchanging cultural information with students from different countries and learning vocabulary from different languages. They spoke of informal language practice with students who were developing their fluency in spoken english. As local people these staff reported meeting students around the town,

exchanging greetings and chatting briefly. Other interactions took more time, staff welcomed people back after a break and listened to stories about holidays and placements. They listened to concerns, both personal and academic and remembered personal information about students, their families and their studies. It has been suggested universities with multiple, distanced, sites may be harder for some students to engage with (Yorke & Thomas 2003). However, some staff expressed a preference for the smaller sites because they got to know the students more easily.

The social aspects of student life are given prominence in student satisfaction surveys and socialising with other students is seen as important in integrating new entrants. A National Union of Students (2008) survey of full-time, undergraduate students' identified that fellow students were an important source of advice, provided motivation to work, learning through discussion and help in understanding the material provided by academic staff. This interaction happened outside of organised course time, in social and residential venues. Students who were enjoying university emphasised aspects of their social experience as being most enjoyable, however, there was concern that non-residential students were encouraged to spend money in canteens, cafes and bars so many used the library for socialising. Consequently social integration may be hampered for non-residential, part-time and mature students who have fewer opportunities for relaxing with peers (Harvey et al, 2006; hefce, 2002). An institutional attempt to assist social engagement within course cohorts is the encouragement of groups of peers to work together (Yorke & Thomas, 2003). This has necessitated re-organisation of estates, with facilities for groups in libraries and informal learning areas (Temple, 2008). People need places to meet, yet a tension exists between fostering a sense of belonging and the security of property. At the University students were locked out of the majority of the built estate. Access was only for specific activities under supervision. The formal work activities of the participants in this study involved servicing the social areas of the university. The large public areas including social venues were supplied, supervised and kept open twenty four hours a day, all year by catering, caretaking and security staff. Security staff kept learning centres open until midnight and staffed twenty-four hour computer facilities. Staff described catering outlets as

informal places where people could relax, away from the pressures of the formal teaching areas. Places where people from different backgrounds could mix in ways that would not be possible outside the university. This help in settling in, becoming known and getting to know others ran alongside a more formal provision of support.

7.4.2 Help Seeking by Students

> "The availability of good pastoral care can be a lifeline for a student who is facing difficulties. Sometimes, it can make the difference between completing a course and dropping out." (BIS, 2011, p.35)

There is a tension in recruiting students who need a greater level of support whilst reducing the ratio of academic staff to students (Hussey & Smith, 2010). A sector response has been the provision of a wide range of specialist services alongside those traditionally responding to eighteen year old school leavers in residential universities (Harvey, et al, 2006; Yorke & Thomas, 2003). The variety of student support services in the University indicated the importance ascribed to them. Individual students were allocated a personal tutor as an individual contact within their courses. A range of institution wide services offered practical advice, help with studying and with personal difficulties. However, being provided with support services does not mean students will use them. They may choose to avoid them, miss information publicising services or not have access at suitable times. Harvey et al (2006) identified a view that those students most needing help may be least likely to seek it.

Clegg et al (2006) investigated why students might not take-up offered support. They found self-reliant people reluctant to seek help. The students they interviewed did not think personal problems were the remit of tutors. There was a belief that they should be able to deal with life's problems, showing distress to tutors might indicate diminished capacity. They did not use the specialist support services for reasons of pride and an association with failure, the main source of support was course peers and social groups. However, they found engaging with staff in informal settings helpful, such as talking with technicians

working in the evenings and having a cup of tea with security staff. Multi-site universities may have particular difficulties of provision which could affect take-up. A study considering the support available to students on a secondary site found access to support services varied. Students may have had to travel to the main site to engage with services and knowledge of what was available was limited to the site they attended. Students had not sought information about services for three reasons, because they didn't know they were there, they assumed tutors would inform them if necessary or they had no need of them. Some commented that they remembered being given information in their first week but it had not been retained (Dhillon et al, 2008). Caretaking, catering and security staff reported signposting students to these services and encouraging contact which could be important in these circumstances.

Different modes of course provision may affect engagement with support services. Students attending part-time, particularly in the evening, weekends or outside term times may find services are not available. During their opening hours services may be mainly accessed through appointments. People must therefore identify themselves as having sufficient difficulty to seek specialist help, make an appointment, possibly travel to an unknown site and be allocated an unknown specialist practitioner. Students may seek other, more informal support. They will encounter many more staff than their personal tutors and specialist support practitioners. Some will be in a position to offer help although constraints may be increasing.

Teaching staff are visible to students but may not be accessible. It is argued that contact with students has lost primacy because managerial attention is directed at developing sources of income, once recruited income from students is fixed (Strike & Taylor, 2009). A loss of face-to-face contact and social intimacy is a theme running throughout the literature. Personal contact between academics and students is thought to be decreasing (UCU, 2006; Kinman & Jones, 2003). Official contact time varies across institutions and subjects, much of it is in large lectures, particularly in the first year. A National Union of Students (2008) survey of full-time, undergraduate students found the average academic staff contact hours were 15

contact hours a week, 8 of which were in lectures. In lectures there may be little interaction or chance for students and staff to get to know each other. They may not meet between these formal occasions and students may not understand the protocols of asking for help (Christie et al, 2008). Efficient management of space may mean rooms are emptied and filled quickly leaving little time for individual contact with teaching staff around lectures (Barnett & Temple, 2006). The use of fixed term contracts and modular teaching may lessen the available time of staff and their own connection with the university and student cohorts (Hussey & Smith, 2010; Trowler, 1997). Tuition in small groups does not provide for intimacy. An investigation found students received, on average, less than an hour's contact in groups of less than 5 people (Sastry & Bekhradnia, 2007). When they do spend time together it may be in impersonal, multifunctional rooms, staff offices not being large enough (Barnett & Temple, 2006).

Personal contact with permanent academic staff may be hampered by their workloads. The weight of consumer and academic expectations of sudents may become overwhelming to staff working over 50 hours a week (Hussey & Smith, 2010; Tight, 2009). Understandably, they may withdraw from contact, even hide, while also mourning their distance (Abouserie, 1996). Academic staff are exposed to constant surveillance through student feedback in surveys and websites. They may need to defend themselves in complaints and legal procedures, this possibility is likely to increase their administrative workload and deepen any wariness towards students. Interactions between students and staff are complicated by the complex positioning of students in the university hierarchy. Direct payments from students create a disputed role as customers and service consumers of an education product (Brookes, 2003). They are numerically dominant and actively engaged in shaping service provision. They are also the largest part of the workforce with staff, particularly teaching staff, positioned as their managers. It is in the interests of the university and the individual student to manage this work to successful completion. However, there are rules and it is the

job of staff to police these rules. Whatever encouragement they may offer, they are also assessing student work and policing academic misbehaviour, with the power to apply sanctions. This has the potential to create tension and wariness or even place staff and students in conflict (Perry, 2008).

Staff other than their tutors or specialist practitioners could be helpful to students, however, general contact between students and other staff is thought to also be reducing. Technological developments have facilitated a reduction in face-to-face contact with academic and administrative staff (Bridges, 2000). At the studied University new students can register on-line and thereafter undertake all administrative and financial tasks via the university website. Problems can be dealt with through electronic help desks. Course information and materials are managed through electronic systems, including communication with staff and peers. Learning resources can be accessed without personal contact. Electronic versions of journals, books and other media can be accessed on or off site. Physical resources can be logged out and in by machine. Librarians offer help through instant messaging. Text messages, 'twitter' and postings on 'facebook' are used as communication tools. These are very efficient systems which allow large numbers of people to process large numbers of tasks, but they are impersonal.

Within these complex relationships catering, caretaking and security staff have a simpler, more straightforward role with students. They are positioned outside of academic assessments. They are accessible at any time without appointment and the rules they enforce are simple and familiar from general life. Harvey et al (2006) suggested a need for flexible institutional support because they identified that there were multiple first year student experiences. Clegg et al (2006) argued that students could not be categorised or their needs considered as areas of problems. Catering, caretaking and security staff would seem to be offering this institution wide support on an informal basis.

‘Friendly’ is a word that recurs in the literature relating to student recruitment, induction and retention. Establishing an environment that is perceived as friendly, welcoming and secure is considered important for engagement (Christie et al, 2008; Harvey et al, 2006; Yorke & Thomas 2003). Whereas there are indications that other occupation groups may attempt to restrict their access to students catering, caretaking and security staff cannot withdraw. They share the public areas of university sites, It therefore seems important that their engagement with students offers more than civil co-existence. The attitude of these staff to students was pro-actively helpful, beyond the requirements of their work activities, this could be seen as meaningful acts of generosity (de Botton, 2009). Lengthy interactions were reported but a widespread friendly approach was also shown in very brief interchanges. Catering assistants are required to have exchanges over what people want to eat but not to ask *how’s your mum did you get to talk to her?.* At the Freshers’ Fair catering staff in a temporary outlet were observed having brief, smiling, exchanges with students buying food. They were busy, standing for long periods but offering more than a basic transaction. Such voluntary activity seemed to arise from two sources, improving their own experience of the job and sympathy with the situation of students.

Staff spoke of finding students interesting, particularly their variety. Involvement with people from countries and cultures different to their own was enjoyed. Social interactions with students provided entertainment and companionship, opportunities for fun and humour, a relief from boredom. Although some interactions could be troublesome, even violent, the majority were pleasurable. Staff spoke of students with an attitude of tolerance, affection and sometimes friendship. They welcomed encounters and volunteered conversation and interaction which provided instances of satisfaction and pleasure. Staff related their experience of being parents of young adults at home to situations at work with young students. This was expressed as sympathy and the capacity to enter into their concerns. One caretaker explicitly connected this parenting role to wanting to treat students as he would like others to treat his children when they went away. There was particular concern for international students who were perceived as alone in another country.

The formal and informal activities of these staff performed important social functions within the organisation, which are neglected in the literature. Their formal role kept the estate clean and tidy, considered important in facilitating a well functioning social organisation (Temple, 2008). They performed the essential household tasks of providing food, supplying, arranging and clearing rooms and keeping people and property safe. This allowed other staff to focus on their specialist roles. Many of these activities were repetitive, all were subject to scrutiny. Informally they had a significant role in the social capacity of the university through their deliberate and knowledgeable deployment of chat and humour. By engaging with the emotional and practical difficulties of the population, especially students, they performed unacknowledged yet essential work. They were structurally positioned by their employer to be exposed to this work, through their continuous and visible presence. In a densely populated environment, such work was bound to occur, but the way they took it up was a personal choice. In one way it offered a means of asserting control over an aspect of otherwise highly structured work. It also allowed for the expression of genuine emotional engagement and social companionship. This contribution to the social capacity of the university was not reflected in job descriptions. It was, however, a deliberate engagement with a necessary part of the functioning of a university. Sennett (2006) argues that there are three problems that can result from the forms of structural institutional change that the public sector has been undergoing. These are a lessening of loyalty towards the institution, a lessening of trust between workers and the loss of institutional knowledge. These are evident in the literature relating to other occupation groups within universities. However, the staff who participated in this study had a pragmatic attachment to the institution based on knowledge of its ranking amongst local employers. Their long term employment allowed for personal loyalties within their work groups and across the organisation and they were a repository of a vast amount of knowledge based on the practical realities of getting things done and keeping others informed.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

This research has addressed the experience of people working in the lowest pay grades within a large, publically funded, higher education employment sector. Universities are considered socially and economically vital, the experience of university staff has attracted research interest, yet the contribution of those staff categorised as manual workers has not. The study has identified informal, voluntary work activities which contribute to the core performance of this sector. This has relevance to university staffing policies and, in times of constricting finances, attitudes to contracting out services to agency staff. It also contributes to the theoretical debate concerning the pro-active engagement of lower status workers within their workplace.

This thesis has sought to examine the role of catering, caretaking and security staff in a modern university by means of a closely examined case study. This approach was undertaken for several reasons. Methodologically it followed the argument of Edwards (2010) that the negotiation of the tensions between the theoretical and empirical study of work can best be done by means of closely contextualised case studies. This is reflected in a deliberate attempt to place the university within its employment sector and the economic circumstances of its geographical locations.

Secondly the thesis has argued that universities as organisations have been and are widely misunderstood.

> "…. the work of higher education has, implicitly, generally been considered as taking place independently of the spaces in which it was located."
> Temple (2008 p.229)

Yet intellects are embodied, universities are peopled organisations. Most of these people gather on built estates. These sites must be supplied, maintained and secured. People require food and drink. Researching the perspective of work of the catering, caretaking and security staff at one university has brought the physical nature of universities into focus. Universities are individual institutions that differ widely. However, one thing they have in common is the presence of a transitory population of students, numbering thousands of people. Large numbers of people gathering together will always require physical services. The staff that provide them have an importance not recognised in discussion of university life. Thirdly the workers who provide these services are significant in number in the case study and most other organisations. They play a major role but are almost completely excluded from the literature. Therefore, the aim has been to give these workers in the case study institution adequate attention in their own right.

Finally, running through the thesis has been a concern with ensuring that acknowledging the many negative structural aspects of work, particularly work for low status and low paid groups, does not preclude an appreciation that a significant element of pro-active crafting of work may also take place. To understand this we need to appreciate how these groups of workers see and experience their roles for themselves. Labour process theorists are concerned with the structural tensions inherent in work in a capitalist economy where the prevailing doctrine is to extract the greatest amount of work for the lowest cost. The ensuing work relations are placed within an expectation of exploitation and resistance. In universities constrictions on funding allied to a massive expansion in student numbers have created a situation where arguably many staff are expected to increase outputs whilst managing reduced resources. These two strands, the experience of low status work within capitalism and work within the specific characteristics of a university, have been concurrent themes throughout the study. Studies of work rooted in discussions of the labour process have three major strengths in relation to this research through their focus on the examination of structural tensions, in a specific place, within current working practices.

8.1 **Structural Tensions**

The first strength is that they engage with the coercive, exploitative nature of work relations, the structural forms that pit individuals and groups into inevitable conflict. This university workplace is located within a capitalist economy with historical class divisions based on occupation. Those employees with highest status had contracts offering highest payment with least controls. The literature concerning change in universities, presented a picture of a workplace containing structural tensions at sector, institution and interpersonal levels. Staff had been positioned in a contested workplace in which conflicting interests would inevitably affect working practice. Universities have developed structural tensions with competition for restricted resources between institutions, stakeholders, functions and individuals. Three factors have come together to place greater focus on the performance of university staff. A political move to increase student numbers, a desire to reduce expenditure in the public sector and the requirement for students to fund more of their tuition costs. One result of these changes may be a shifting of historical power relations between the different population groups in universities. The dominance of high status academic staff in the literature presents a view of 'academic' and 'non-academic' or 'other' staff which conflates a range of different occupations with contested roles and different levels of engagement influence and reward. Managers and students have arguably gained organisational power in relation to those staff with primary allegiance to academic values. A reduction in funding per student may have resulted in, or facilitated a move towards, the deskilling and intensification of the work of all parts of university workforces, staff and students. Resistance to this process can be seen in industrial action against reductions in terms and conditions, opposition to redundancies, political activism and rises in litigation and complaint levels. Less public action can be traced in academic commentary and research through polemic, argument and a noted withdrawal from some aspects of engagement in work activities and workplace social interactions. In university workplaces managers may have little scope to offer individual inducements or means of sanctioning staff in unionised and scrutinised workplaces with established employment practices. They may, however be able to capitalise on the values of public service and academic standards held by some of the workforce.

Within this hierarchal workplace the participants in this study had the lowest formal employment status. They shared this position with another informal workforce, the students. The subject that dominated the conversations and observations of these staff was the presence of and interactions with the university students. The presence of students is a key characteristic of a university as a workplace, affecting the employment conditions in which manual staff work. In occupational status they are positioned just above students, in organisational status this is arguable as paying students have contested hierarchal power. Catering, caretaking and security staff are also positioned as service workers. This may allow them to be perceived as in a subservient position in dealings with all other members of the university population, positioned as customers. This is further complicated by being workers offering physical services in an organisation dependent on valuing intellectual work.

Studies that have investigated work experience in particular universities have done so without placing them within their local employment context. They are largely concerned with the work of affluent people, drawn from wide labour markets. The workplace examined in this study is located in a geographical area experiencing economic decline and social disadvantage. The prevailing local economy affects the choices people have in the work they do. There was uncertainty as to whether the catering, caretaking and security staff would view the university as a particular kind of workplace different from others which offered employment for these occupations. Participants located their work in the need to earn money with pragmatic expectations based on previous experience and knowledge of the local job market. The regulated nature of the employment was important as was the perceived institutional security. The university being identified as an important local employer may provide a partial reason for the low turnover of these staff. The long term nature of their employment was important in what they offered their employer. It enabled them to gather a wealth of knowledge about the physical and organisational reality of the university, creating a resource of information on which others could draw. It was also raised as contributing to the safety of the population with their vigilance relying on knowing what was normal. They also developed detailed knowledge of the emergency procedures

relevant to a multiplicity of sites and equipment. The staff in these three occupation groups needed to co-operate. Knowledge of, and loyalty towards, each other was important. This took time to develop. Having the same staff on duty, offering a consistent presence also helped in getting to know the populations of each site, making people easier to manage at times of emergency and conflict.

8.2 **The Specific Place**

The second strength of studies of labour process is that they focus attention on the physical by giving attention to a specific workplace at the point where the capacity for work is deployed. The focus on the physical is missing in studies of university life, although these institutions inhabit large and costly estates which are of importance in their locality. Space is contested in universities, professional staff with service employment contracts may have a lower requirement for attendance at their workplace. When present, they may appropriate the available private space. The dominance of high status staff in the research literature does not take account of the workstations or work environment of the majority of the workforce.

Addressing the changes in the university sector from a physical perspective was useful in that it brought attention to the changing requirements of the built environment and the interrelation between that and staff working practices. This presented a picture of a large, fragmented and dispersed population which was subject to tensions at an institutional and interpersonal level. One aspect of change in universities has been the refurbishing of the built estate and the requirement to maximise its commercial potential. Business partners and customers, conference delegates, tenants, visitors, summer school pupils and local people contribute to a complex use of this estate. The core population of staff and students has changed its patterns of physical attendance. The recruitment of part-time, mature and commercial students has resulted in an increased number of people with sporadic or

episodic engagement. Staff may have a short-term or continuing presence, part-time or full-time. Whilst these changes and the consequent fragmentation of university populations are documented, the impact on the social interactions of staff and students has received little attention.

The identification of the mobile and continuous presence of these staff led to consideration of the nature of interactions across the entire university population rather than to elements of it. The catering, caretaking and security staff could be seen as the unobtrusive glue that stuck it all together, through continual purposeful encounters outside of the contested structures. The invisibility of these staff to academic study is unfortunate as they offered a valuable perspective on university life. Staffing university sites across twenty-four hours, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks of the year they were uniquely placed to have direct contact with all the elements within the university population. They were therefore, collectively, in a position to offer insights which other staff could not have, into the functioning of the institution. At a time when the finances of universities are facing significant change, including the transfer of tuition fees to individuals, their contribution to the reputation and knowledge base of these institutions should not be overlooked.

8.3 **Organisation and Control of Work**

The third strength of labour process analysis is the attention accorded the organisation and control of the actual work activities. Participants presented two interdependent areas of work, the formal and the informal, the formal role was acknowledged in job descriptions and training. The informal role was less recognised. The formal activities of these staff enabled the university to keep open and operate legally. They facilitated its smooth running and accommodated, fed and protected the university population. Their formal work activities were subject to control as to time, place and surveillance. In order to maintain these services throughout the year at all times, the university employer required flexible working practices from these staff who accommodated flexibility of location, shift and role. The research participants welcomed aspects of the variety this imposed, partly to mitigate the

effects of repetitive work and low pay, partly because it allowed for personal choices in activity. Mobility and variety created inevitable social interactions, these everyday encounters provided opportunities for autonomous action within highly structured and controlled working days. Such opportunities for informal unstructured work activities created the potential for autonomous deliberate acts to craft the work environment. In the main these were used in ways that contributed to the worker's individual satisfaction yet also contributed to the central purpose of their employer. Some actions were taken, directly and knowingly in support of their employer's aims and reputation, others were less overt, engaged with creating the mood of the workplace, beneficial to the whole university population. One impetus to this was enjoyment, there was a deliberate deployment of behaviour which created pleasing social connections. Participants reported engaging in playful encounters which gave pleasure to themselves and others.

It is at this point that labour process analysis becomes less helpful, a focus on the structural conflicts of the workplace may miss some of the pleasures. Fun, play, banter and the development of affectionate relationships are positioned in the literature as means of resistance and survival through the creation of coherent groups and alliances. The pleasure to be gained from widespread social interactions across different groups has been rarely addressed. There can be constraints in acknowledging the enjoyment that people can experience in low paid, low status work. Such a focus may be taken as legitimising the exploitation involved in poor conditions of employment. These staff had little control over their working day or contractual security. They were exposed to aggressive behaviour, their work was physically tiring and often boring. They were employed under labour contracts in which quantified work, explained in specific job descriptions, was required in exchange for a set wage. Yet they were situated in a peopled environment in which work activities inevitably arose outside of those descriptions and contractual arrangements. In these circumstances participants spoke of enjoying some aspects of their time on shift. This could be discounted as the discretion of staff, aware of their employer's reputation, talking to an outsider. However, there was sufficient corroborating detail for the reporting of enjoyment to be accepted. Some of the enjoyment they created for themselves was indeed in reaction to and

protection from the demands made of them. Some, however, reflected enjoyment in the university as a lively, interesting place, full of a variety of people affording the pleasures of social connections. The study of the actual workplaces of lower status public sector workforce has been surprisingly limited. Taking these workers seriously and allowing the ambiguity of their relationships and roles to be properly explored in modern workplaces like universities is therefore a step forward to a better understanding of the complexity of work.

The more usual dynamic in the literature concerned with the study of workplace relations is between managers and workers. Here there is a third workforce with a contested position within the hierarchy, a large, fluctuating, population of students, who attend for many years. This makes the university workplace an interesting one in which to consider work generally and service work in particular. The duration of attendance of students affects the customer service aspect of work. The more usual dynamic in the literature concerned with the emotional cost of service work locates these transactions in brief, high turnover encounters. In this workplace service providers had choice whether to engage and if so how, with the potential for long term working relationships. Considering the tension between control and autonomy in the everyday work of these staff revealed the importance of informal, discretionary activity within the opportunities offered by social interactions. Catering, caretaking and security are amongst the lowest paid, lowest hierarchal status staff in any workplace stratified by occupation. Universities are no exception but, despite this position these staff chose to undertake work activities beyond the requirements of their job. They presented themselves as engaged, alert people who were socially inclined, helpful and able to enjoy aspects of their working day, particularly engagement with students.

8.4 **Interactions with Students**

As an outsider looking into work and workers in one university, I was soon struck by the realisation that those staff physically encountered daily on university sites were absent in the literature. However, this became easier to understand in the context of the paradox of their visibility on the ground. They are structurally positioned to be overlooked. By being everywhere, all the time they can be taken for granted. The nature of their formal work activities, to feed, facilitate and protect, may also not engage the interest of people aligned to the intellectual purpose of universities. But these functions may resonate with a particular section of the population, the students. It was interesting that when discussing this research with academics, informally or at seminars and conferences, they volunteered many anecdotes about their own student days and their relationships with staff in these occupations in other universities. Certainly the primary alignment of the research participants seemed to be with each other and with students, who also occupied low status in the hierarchy, although positioned rather differently.

Early observation had given an indication of frequent interactions between these staff and students but the level of engagement was unexpected as was the level of affection.

> A member of catering staff still enjoyed the company of students, even after more than twenty-five years working in the university
>
> > They come in September and they get to be your friends and you just get to know them and it's like you've always known them

It would seem that the lowest paid university staff had arguably the most contact with students, certainly were most accessible to them. The impression of their work in the university created by the participants was of a steady murmur of greetings, recognition, information, reassurance, comfort, encouragement, chatting and laughter operating alongside the formal structures of the university. This is an element of the experience of

work that is still insufficiently recognised in the literature. Giving attention to the physical environment highlighted the degree to which students and these staff shared the same terrain. They were channeled into the same locations at the same times, informal contact was inevitable. The length of students' courses meant these contacts were potentially very different from brief service transactions. How the staff behaved during these interactions fostered relationships built over time.

During an interview in a refectory, a catering staff member described how she gradually gets to know students, a pro-active process. This extract is an edited compilation from various parts of the interview.

> *I will talk to anybody - how's things? how are you?, what course you doing? how long are you going to be here? - just asking simple questions. Then after a few weeks what is your name? … so I kind of build up to it…..*
>
> *… if you can greet them by their names or enquire about their families or something they've told you about then they're really nice, they're pleased that you've remembered them, I think that's important to a person … to make them feel welcome I think.*
>
> *I mean obviously if you see people on a daily basis or a weekly basis then you do get to (know them). …I stop on a night on Thursdays so I get to see the mature students. I'll get to know - what problems they've had and how they're getting on on their course … because I know them*
>
> *We welcome them back (from holidays), how's the ... gone? how are you getting on with your new course? and things like that so I do enquire what they've done…. they're coming back in September telling me all about that and things like that you do get to know what they're doing.*

This gives a flavour of people gradually becoming known to each other, through frequent interactions over time, where information is exchanged and remembered. In an environment peopled by tens of thousands, being welcomed, recognised and treated with friendly interest may be invaluable.

This research has identified the informal role of staff whose formal jobs were not concerned with student support but who, nevertheless, had considerable student contact. They offered consistent, knowledgeable, accessible contact to students grappling with the background, everyday things of life and the university. They could engage in friendly, simple, face-to-face interactions in what could be a large, complex and frightening place.

One Caretaker, who had children approaching university age, enjoyed helping new students settle in. He was sympathetic to distress and disorientation in young people.

> *students been here a few weeks, went into the kitchen to repair something and girl crying. Sat and talked for a couple of hours - should have been doing some other work I suppose – that girl stopped – not saying it was me but here for 4 years and saw her around, every Christmas come to reception with present. When she left, card/flowers/whisky - card said – I will never forget that first day in the kitchen - that meant the world to me.* (Caretaker 15 Notes)

This story encapsulates recurring strands of participants' encounters with students. They can meet students anywhere and at any time. They can offer informal, kindly support. Meetings can be casual and repeated over the full duration of a student's course. This may have an effect on some student's successful engagement with university and on retention.

Between them, they were available and visible on all sites, at all times, sometimes they were the only staff available. This support was offered in pro-active and in responsive ways, initiating conversation and spending time listening to concerns, both personal and academic. These relationships were placed within a clear recognition of the parameters of work. However, in some cases there could be an exchange of reciprocal information and the development of friendship. Staff were keenly aware of the tensions of critical times in a student's engagement with the university and adjusted their own behaviour to accommodate them.

They were well placed to help students navigate the institution, encountering new situations throughout the duration of lengthy courses. They held knowledge about the everyday things below the level of official communication, knowledge derived from experience of organisational functioning, knowing all the sites, encountering generations of students and being local people. They could also repeat and reinforce information that was formally disseminated but not assimilated. Their activities of chat, comfort, reassurance and information provision may have helped in the management of anxiety in individuals and consequently in the overall population. With this role identified it may now be useful to investigate their possible role in passing on organisational norms and consequently contributing to the informal curriculum.

8.5 **Final Reflections**

Walking onto the university site for the first time my initial impression was people and movement, so many people moving purposefully amidst a collection of buildings. This combination of people and place has remained dominant throughout the study. The staff who kept these people moving, who fed, helped and protected them and who serviced and supplied their buildings, made a significant contribution to the life of this institution. Reflecting on the time spent in the busy, peopled university sites, images come to mind, some are instances of sights seen many, many times. Looking across a courtyard and seeing the silhouette of a tall, uniformed security officer, the focus of two people looking up at him. Some banter, all three smiling and him leaning down to listen while pointing out their way. Or standing watching people swirling around between buildings, seeing groups talking and laughing, some people hurrying, some strolling. Amidst them all, weaving unobtrusively between them, eyes to the ground, two caretakers picking up the litter. Walking past the windows of a busy refectory, seeing people sitting at tables in groups, talking and laughing, some alone, some working on laptops, most eating and drinking the food catering staff had served them. One memory reoccurs because it is not within the everyday. Sitting with security staff in a training room, energy, banter, one man doubled up with tears of laughter running down his face. Then a change of mood, as we watched a film of a fire spreading in

a populated place, showing the speed of the fire spreading, seeing people disorientated and unable to fully perceive their danger, knowing some had died. The discussion that followed among staff who could be moving towards that danger, somber, reflective, serious talking.

Universities are social organisations, thousands of people gather together with all of their emotions, tensions and pleasures. University estates are big, thousands of people must move through them safely. The unobtrusive and perhaps unacknowledged behaviour of these staff offers much to the university population - as participants put it

to make them feel welcome

to keep the place secure and the people secure

to help students and help everybody and keep the place running smoothly

Interesting times are approaching for university staff and students. The earlier chapters drew together the strands of structural tensions that are an inevitable result of sector developments. These are likely to be exacerbated in the foreseeable future. Density of occupation of expensive estate is unlikely to be eased. Further pressure to maximise returns will involve complex multipurpose use by groups with conflicting priorities. The perspective of those staff who have intimate knowledge of the sites, who facilitate efficient room use and interact with all customers groups may be of increasing value. The trebling of tuition fees for individual students will increase the pressures of commercialisation and complicate further the interdependent roles of students and staff. Competition between universities, departments and individuals is set to increase while levels of student satisfaction are likely to be minutely examined and marketed. Staff and students may be positioned in contested employment relations, those staff positioned outside of the management of students' academic work may have an important role to play, as illustrated by the earlier vignettes. The mourned loss of intimacy with students, reported by academic staff, prompts a requirement for a wider understanding of how students interact with the whole complement of university staff rather than with elements of it.

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To All Caretaking, Cleaning and Security Staff at (University name)

Dear Caretaking, Cleaning and Security Staff

The contribution of caretaking, cleaning and security staff to University social organisation, income, student recruitment and retention is overlooked in research into University life.

I am writing to ask for your help in a research project about the experience of this work in the University ….. I am looking for people who have worked at the University for four years or more who are willing to discuss their experience. I would come to meet you whenever is most convenient to you and could talk with you at work, accompanying you during your usual activities.

Information you provide will be confidential.

(identifying information removed)

If you may be willing to participate or have any questions please contact me:
(identifying information removed)
- e.mail -
- phone/text
- postal address -

I will very much appreciate hearing from you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Lib Meakin

June 2009

Participant Information Sheet

The Project

The purpose of this research is to investigate the experience of work as catering, cleaning, caretaking and security staff in the (identifying information removed)

Why is this research being carried out?

Most published research on the work experience of University staff is about academics with some on administrative, support and managerial staff. The contribution of catering, cleaning, caretaking and security staff to the social organisation and income of the University as well as to student recruitment, retention and learning is overlooked.

Who is Doing It?

Lib Meakin, the researcher, is a PhD student
(identifying information removed)

How is the research being carried out?

Through conversation with staff, observation at work and the examination of documents between April 2009 and March 2010.

Who is being asked to participate?

People who have worked at the University for four years or more in catering, cleaning, caretaking and security jobs who are willing to offer their experience.

What am I being asked to do?

If you are willing to participate you can choose from different ways of taking part:

a) Having conversations with Lib either in recorded interviews or informal discussions.
b) Meeting Lib with your colleagues for a group discussion.
c) Allowing Lib to accompany you on your shift or to observe your workplace.
d) To offer information you may have kept for other reasons e.g. blogs.

Anyone can withdraw from the research at any time.

Will it be confidential?

Coding will be used so that only the researcher can match any piece of information to any individual. Interview transcripts and notes of conversations will be kept in a locked facility and destroyed after 5 years. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group discussions as everyone there will know who said what.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be made available (identifying information removed) and elsewhere through a written thesis, articles and presentations at seminars and conferences.

What do I do next?

If you are willing to participate or have any questions please let Lib Meakin know: (identifying information removed)

- postal address -
- e.mail -
- phone/text

to arrange a time to meet that is convenient for you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information

Consent Form

I understand that if I take part in this research project with Lib Meakin:

- identifying information will be removed before publication or discussion with others;
- interview transcripts or notes of conversations will be kept in a secure facility for a period of 5 years and then destroyed;

	Yes	No
I am willing to take part in this research project	□	□
I am willing to be recorded during interviews	□	□
I am willing to be observed	□	□
I am willing to be accompanied on work shifts	□	□

I have read and fully understand the information that has been provided on

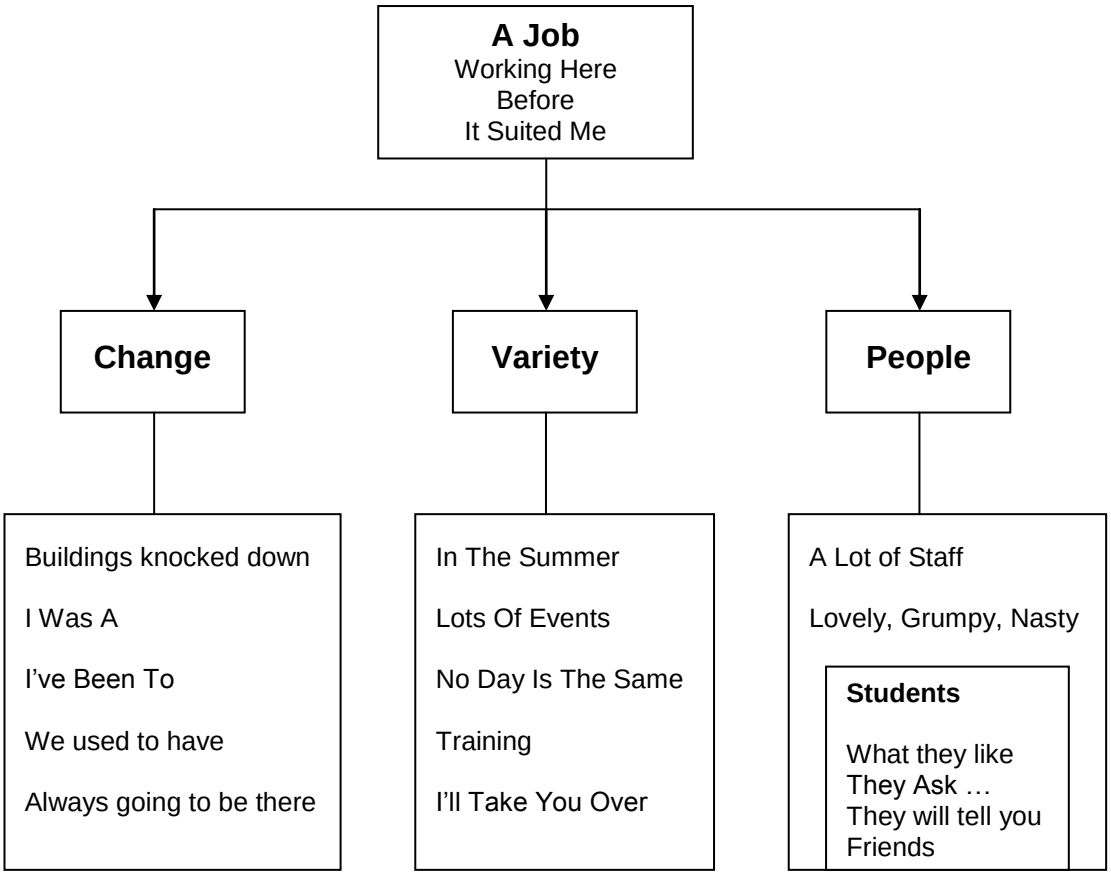
the information sheet

_____ (signature)

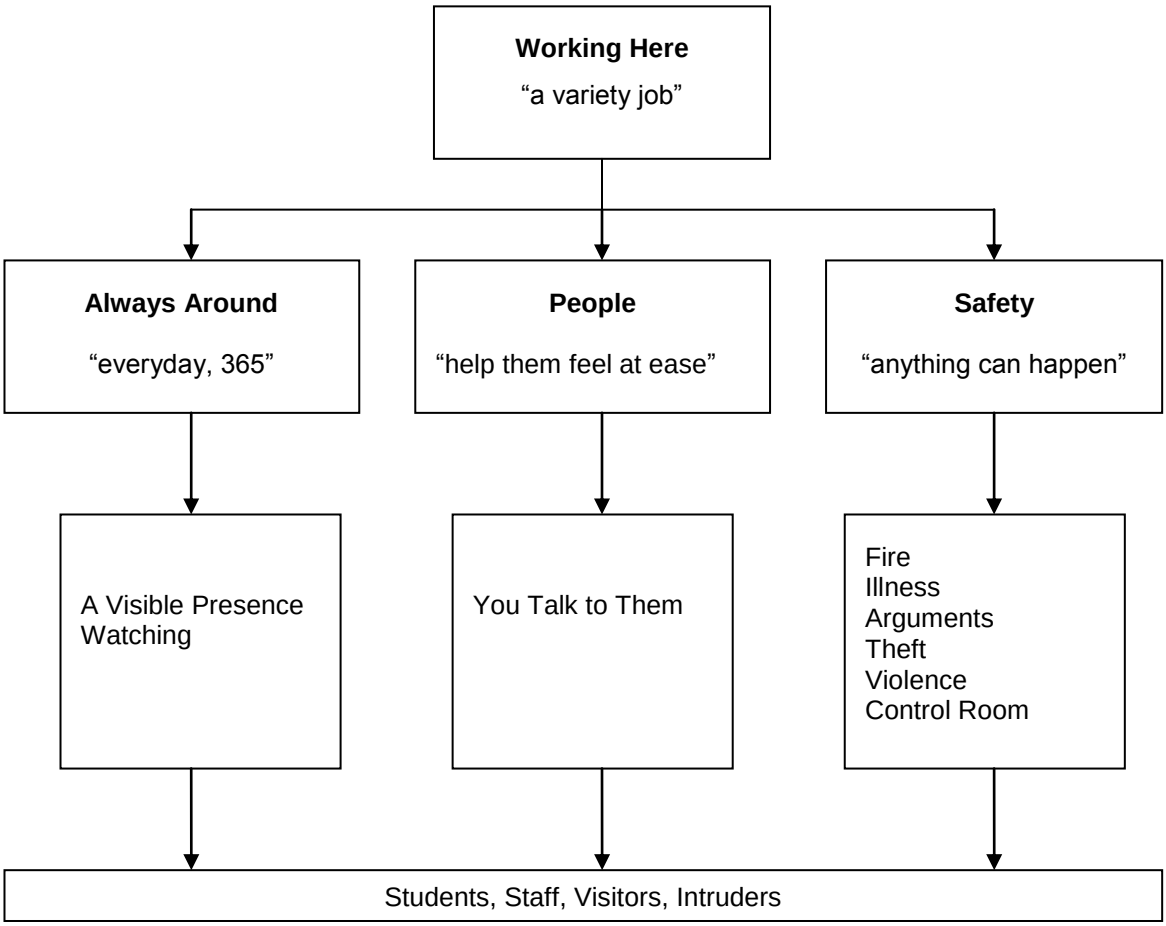
_____ (name in print)

_____ (date)

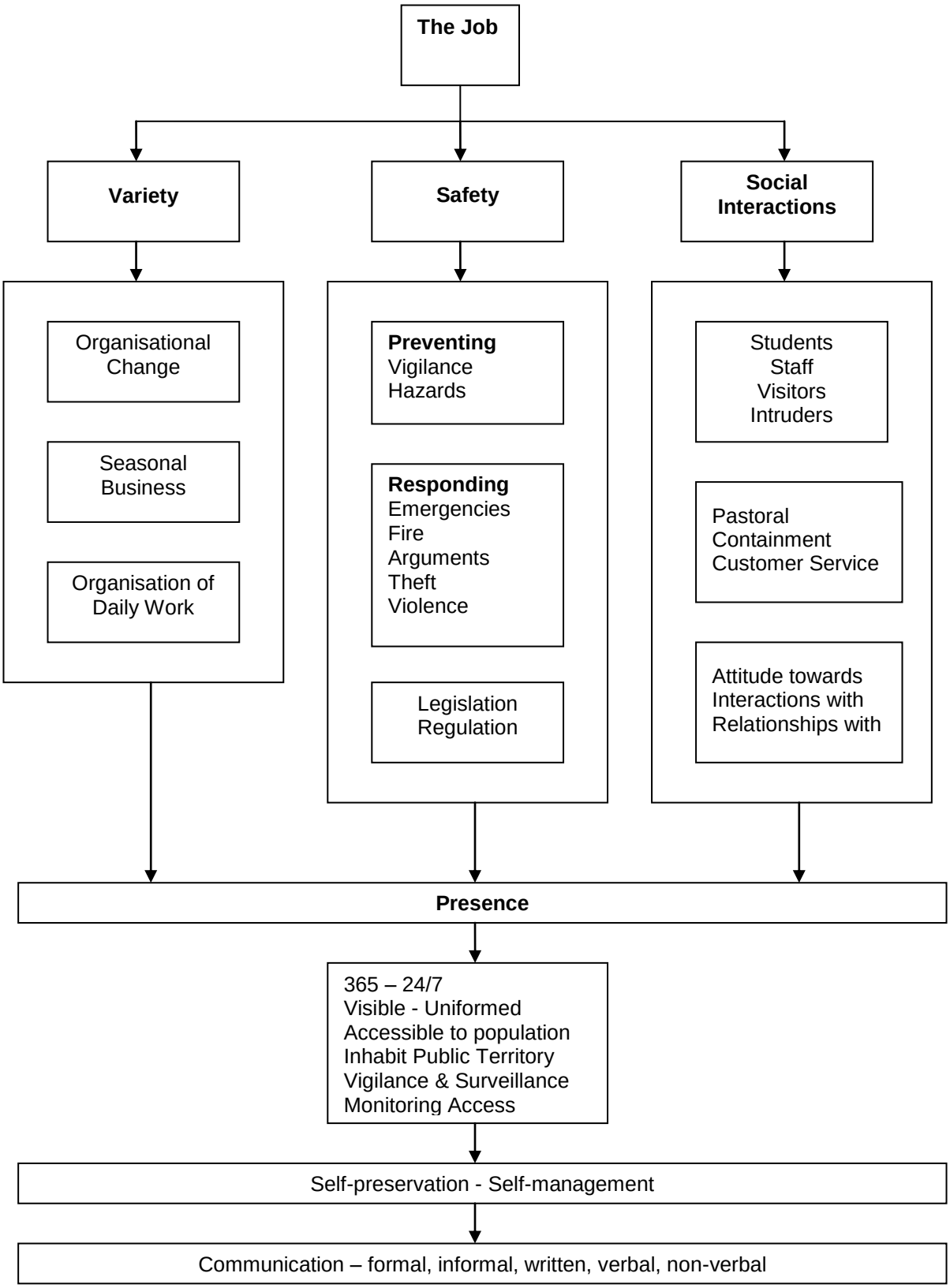
Catering Staff Interviews, Data Set 3



Security and Caretaking Staff – Data Set 4



Security Staff Training Observations - Data Set 6 Core Data Set Categories



The Case Study Data Overview